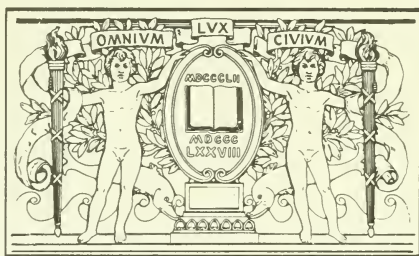


THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY



ALPHONSE DAUDET



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THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY





OH, THIS FAMILY, THIS FAMILY ! ”

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

BY

ALPHONSE DAUDET

TRANSLATED BY LEVIN CARNAC

WITH A CRITICAL SKETCH BY

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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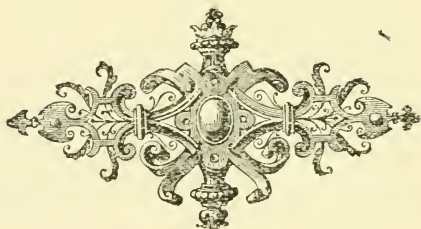
This volume is published in Paris under the title of "Le Soutien de Famille." The English publishers have given to their edition the title "The Bread Winner." There were objections to the use of this latter term for the American volume and it has been decided, in place of attempting a literal rendering of the author's original title, to utilise for the American edition a wording which, while differing from that selected by the author, may be considered as fairly expressing the purport of the story.



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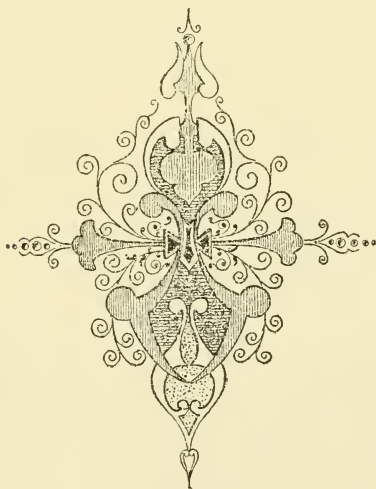
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ALPHONSE DAUDET*

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY ADOLPHE COHN

ALPHONSE DAUDET is dead ! In his death, which occurred on the 16th of last December, France has lost one of her brightest ornaments. He departed without one unkind word being uttered or one uncharitable thought being harboured by anybody, not even by the French Academy, in spite of his having written *L'Immortel*, not even by the Tarasconese, although he is the creator of the immortal Tartarin ! And this universal kindliness around his open grave went to the writer no less than to the man, to the man no less than to the writer.

But what idea must we preserve of the latter ? What will posterity say or think of him ? What will remain of all that he wrote, to tell our descendants how he charmed us for a period of twenty or twenty-five years ?

The first thing that must be noticed about him, it seems to me, the one feature which lies both at the surface of his works and in the very marrow of his nature,

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is that he was the one genuine *méridional* among the men of letters of his country. The course of history has given France such a strong, compact, national unity that we easily forget how discordant the elements were out of which French nationality has been formed. That there once was a Northern France and a Southern France which harboured none but feelings of enmity toward each other ; that these two countries, wholly dissimilar in language, in institutions, in religious and ethical views, once fiercely rushed upon each other ; that the Northern Frenchman was in the South hated as a ruthless conqueror, an ignorant and contemptuous destroyer of everything that was held dear and beautiful in the conquered country, is now all but forgotten, save by the close student of historical records. The South, it need hardly be said, gave to France afterward many a brilliant intellect, more, perhaps, than the North. But the sons of the South were taken hold of by the new nationality that resulted from the blending of the two halves, and are thought of simply as Frenchmen. Who thinks of the *méridional* in Thiers and Mignet, in Montaigne, in Montesquieu, in Guizot ? Even Gambetta's exuberance is ascribed, and not unjustly, to his Italian father's more than to his Southern French mother's blood. In Daudet the Southerner, the Provençal, is discernible in nearly every line that he wrote. It is the sunshine of his native Provence that illumines his works and gives them the peculiar warmth which is one of their most attractive features.



ALPHONSE DAUDET.

Oh, to be sure, he is a Southerner of a peculiar kind ! He is not a Gascon ; he does not, as the hero of the popular story, wonder that the river Garonne, or the Rhone, even, could give out enough water to fill all the seas and oceans. The Provençal that was in him had become a Parisian too, endowed with that keen sense of the ridiculous which is carried on the banks of the Seine farther than anywhere else, and sometimes altogether too far. The Parisianised Daudet could look from outside at the natives of his dear Provence, or else Tartarin never would have appeared. But his conception, if not of life itself, at least of that which makes life worth living, which makes it beautiful, remained Southern to the last ; to the last his favourite music must have been the scraping of the *cigales'* wings, his favourite library, that *Bibliothèque des Cigales* of which he speaks in one of his most charming stories.

Then he was a poet, not a singer exactly, though *Les Amoureuses*, his first volume of verse, contains some of the prettiest poems written in France since the hushing of the three great poetical voices of the century, but a poet who had to draw music and harmony out of every sound of nature, out of every manifestation of social life. His saddest works, *L'Evangéliste* and *Sapho*, have their bit of brightness, their corner of repose, where the soul may rest awhile from the stern tragedies of real life.

And yet those who call him a realist are not altogether wrong. He was not out of place in the famous

quartette of writers of which he was a member together with Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt, and his lifelong friend, Émile Zola. As soon as he found himself in Paris—and he was then only seventeen years of age—in 1857, he began to observe and to take notes. He saw quickly and noted accurately, with too great minuteness, perhaps, everything that he saw, and he soon acquired the gift of choosing the characteristic detail which must appeal to the eye and leave in the mind of the reader an indestructible image of the person described. Where is the reader of Daudet who has not before his eyes the standing silhouette of Monsieur Chèbe, Sidonie's father, who cannot accept any sitting business, and therefore has always to be up and doing—nothing?

A realist he undoubtedly was, but what sort of a realist? He was intensely interested in life; he loved to say what he had seen. We are not sure that this is not a Southern trait. His Numa Roumestan, a true Southerner, could not think except when speaking; but the reverse also is true of the *méridional*; what is in his mind and memory must come out, in talk or in print. And Daudet was as wonderful in his conversation as in his books. Life, the every-day events that he came across, were so interesting to him that he at times hardly dared to alter them when introducing them in his books. No one certainly could complain of poverty of imagination in the man who wrote the *Lettres de mon Moulin* and the *Contes du Lundi*, *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné*, and *Sapho*, and yet the same man

has, perhaps, transferred bodily into his writings more actual events related in the newspapers, in the court-house, or in society, than any other writer of the present age ; of some of his novels one hardly dares say that they are works of fiction ; their characters are men and women of our time, we know their names, and they do in the book almost exactly what they have done in real life. Paris society was not a little amused once when, in a celebrated separation case, an incident was testified to by witnesses as having actually had for its heroine the woman in the case which formed one of the most entertaining chapters of *Les Rois en Exil*, then the most recently published of Daudet's novels.

But this is not true of *all* of his books. We dare say it is not true of the best of them. Thus, for instance, it is hardly disputed by anyone that *Port Tarascon* is decidedly inferior to the two preceding volumes of the Tartari series, *Tartarin de Tarascon* and *Tartarin sur les Alpes* ; and it is well known that the original of Port Tarascon was *Port-Breton*, a fantastic and swindling colonisation scheme, which brought poverty and ruin to hundreds of French families, and landed its originator in a French jail. *Le Nabab* belongs to the same class. Daudet himself did not, in fact, he could not, deny that the Duc de Mora was the Duc de Morny, by whom he had been employed as secretary ; everybody in Paris, especially around the Chamber of Deputies, knew who was the original of Jansoulet, the nabob, and the same stories were read in the novel which had

been related in the lobbies, and even in the open sessions of the House, when it had had to pass upon the credentials of the unscrupulous but good-natured adventurer. We could name here the physician, many said "the quack doctor," whom everybody then recognised in Dr. Jenkins; charity forbids. The same thing is true of *Les Rois en Exil*. In his *Souvenirs d'un Homme de Lettres* Daudet himself states, what everybody knew, moreover, that his Queen of Illyria was the ex-Queen of Naples, who had been living in Paris since the conquest of her kingdom by Garibaldi and Vittorio Emanuele; everybody knew, not far from the Tuileries, the real-estate agency which is so brightly described in the book, and the managers of which play such an important part in the development of the story.

The above features we single out not as merits, but as decided shortcomings in some of Daudet's novels. The explanation is obvious. Daudet did not write a history; he still clung to the idea that he was writing a novel. He conscientiously invented his plot, created some of the surrounding characters, but he had to make the whole fit in with every detail of the incidents which he had borrowed from real life, and which he had not previously transformed by the process of intellectual digestion, which is one of the necessary labours of the novelist. Those works of Daudet's are not unlike the panoramas, so popular in Paris and elsewhere a few years ago, where, between the spectator and the circular canvas, which was the work of the artist, were

placed real material objects—trees, guns, carriages, etc.—intended to intensify the realistic effect. They did intensify it for a while, until close observation revealed the exact line where reality ceased and representation began. It seems to us that the same line is visible in such works as *Le Nabab*, *Les Rois en Exil*, and *Numa Roumestan*.

We are not sure that the same ought not to be said of *Le Petit Chose* also. The interest of the work lies in its autobiographical character, but it is not a simple autobiography, in which the author takes care to state nothing which is not true. The form is that of the novel, and the imaginary have to fit in exactly with the real incidents. Here, as in the above novels, it seems to us that the blending of the two elements has not been accomplished with perfectly artistic accuracy, and for the same reason, because the real incidents of the author's life are presented too much as they actually occurred. What would be a great merit in an historical work becomes thus a blemish in a work of fiction. How much more fascinating, because more convincing, the short chapters that constitute *Trente Ans de Paris* and the *Souvenirs d'un Homme de Lettres*, especially those that are headed *Histoire de mes Livres*! Here we have simple notes taken down almost day by day, where Daudet's marvellous accuracy of vision and power of delicate rendering stand out by themselves and interpose between us and reality nothing but the most deliciously translucid atmosphere.

Does this mean that Daudet was unable to create? By no means. When at his best he is a creator. In fact, he was essentially a creator, because a poet, but so curious of life in all its manifestations, that when he had held a portion of it under his observation he found it extremely painful to alter it in the smallest particular. That the public was quite ready to accept reality as transformed by his poetic imagination ought to have been made clear to him by the reception given to his first successful novel, which, perhaps, remains his masterpiece, *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné*. The characters in the novel were every one of them types, not individuals, or rather they were possibilities, not realities; they were almost truer than life, and at once Delobelle, the *cabotin* accepted by his family, and to a certain extent by himself, as a man of genius, poor self-sacrificing Mademoiselle Zizi, Sigismund Planus, the faithful cashier, Monsieur Chèbe, and, above all, the bewitching, scheming, and perverse Sidonie took their place among those products of human fancy which we are hardly able at times to distinguish from our real acquaintances.

And, ten years later, in *Sapho*, we find the same achievement repeated, with less delicacy and less purity, perhaps, but with greater power of compact and logical construction. And here, we think, lies the greatest difference between Daudet and the great English writer to whom he has often been compared. Daudet's tragedies are of the simplest kind; they

spring from the natures of his characters ; they are every-day events, important for them alone ; we pass by them, and do not notice them ; they would hardly provide a newspaper with one paragraph ; no shipwrecking storms, no kidnappings, no murders ; and they are only the more real, the more heartrending for their simplicity and homeliness. Give Jean Gaussin a little more strength of will, a little less susceptibility to sensuous enjoyments, and *Sapho's* tragedy disappears ; and the tragedy itself, what does it amount to ? A man overboard, that is all. It happens every day.

L'Evangéliste, in our estimation, ranks nearly as high as *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné* and *Sapho*. But here, again, a certain unreality is discoverable, due, no doubt, to the fact that the main incident was an event which had actually occurred in the family, if we are not mistaken, of the Daudet children's music teacher. In fact, the more Daudet trusts to his poetical faculty of transforming truth the more real he is.

This is the secret of the extraordinary success of his short stories. There real occurrences had to be left out ; they would have taken too much room ; the artist dealt with possibilities, not with realities, and gave the most minute and convincing life to the dreams of his fancy. His two great faculties are both manifested in the highest degree in these earlier and, perhaps, most perfect products of his genius, the *Lettres de mon Moulin*, the *Contes du Lundi*, etc. Sometimes Daudet's fancy is fed by reality, as in *Le Siège de*

Berlin, than which anything more realistic can hardly be imagined ; sometimes it is all poetry—the poetry of nature and love, the warm sunshine and the penetrating aroma of the fields of Provence, as in *Le Sous-Préfet aux Champs*. And whether realistic or poetical, his stories possess a charm which is due both to the author's inexhaustible sympathy with every form of life and to the accuracy of an unpretentious and self-restrained descriptive style.

This self-restraint Daudet does not always practise. In some of his larger works, in *Le Nabab*, for instance, he once in a while allowed himself to be carried away by a desire of turning his pen into a brush, which has the invariable result of introducing vagueness of utterance. It may do well in other languages ; it does not in French. French style may be narrative, oratorical, descriptive, poetical to a certain extent ; but suggestiveness is not its province. When the outline is not clear, real good French is absent. How many of the French writers of the last thirty years are open to the above criticism ! Daudet is not altogether free from that fault, but with him it appears only here and there, in patches, as it were ; it is not a regular component of his literary nature. In fact, we would willingly say that no one was freer from it, with the exception of the lamented Guy de Maupassant.

Clearness and completeness of vision, perfect accuracy of statement, and sympathy, these are the qualities that made Daudet, perhaps, not only the novelist and story-

writer that he is, but also the first of French humourists. It has been said not seldom that the French have wit, but no humour. While true in general, we doubt whether an exception ought not to be made in favour of a few quite modern authors, at the head of whom Daudet stands pre-eminent. Who would realise the difference between humour and wit need only pass from the perusal of the 'Tartarin volumes to almost any of Edmond About's short stories. About's wit is simply irresistible, and laughter comes up to our lips and eyes whether we wish it or not. With Daudet it is simply an amused and kindly smile. We see this big Southern, fun-loving, bragging 'Tartarin uttering lies as big as houses, first among his own townspeople, whom he does not expect to believe him any more than he believes himself, then among other people, who first take him at his word, and whose contempt he cannot understand after they have found that his heroism is all Southern froth, and no more ; all his ethical vagaries amuse us like the gambols of some big fishes. We do not want him to hurt himself ; but we feel he is not exactly a man after our own likeness. Daudet knows all that and tells us : " Look at him, all the same. He is not useless ; he 'll bring into your life a ray of his Southern sunshine, provided you do not take him *au sérieux*." No wonder the 'Tarasconese never forgave him for making their small town the special home of this peculiar branch of the genus man !

On the whole, barring the terrible physical suffer-

ings which in the last thirteen years of his life he endured with admirable fortitude,—a fortitude made comparatively easy by the loving devotion of his wife,—Daudet was a happy man. In one direction, however, he knew what disappointment was. It was one of his ambitions to be a dramatic writer, and he does not seem to have been meant for one. He who saw others so well was unable to gain the same accurate knowledge of his own nature. He wrote a good deal for the stage, and even before he published any of his novels. *L'Arlésienne*, which was not his first dramatic attempt, was performed when *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné* was not yet written. His dramatic writings are not without merit, and they did not go without a certain degree of success, but they lack the clear, rapid, logical development which is necessary on the stage. Daudet's great gift of accurate and complete vision here obstructed his path rather than helped his progress. He did not know what to set forth and what to omit. Indeed, he sometimes omitted what was most essential for dramatic emotion, so that the only thing to expect of his characters was the unexpected. There are beautiful scenes, though, in *L'Arlésienne*, in *La Lutte pour la Vie*, and especially in *L'Obstacle*, the one of his dramas which comes nearest to being a real play ; but a string of scenes is not a drama. In Daudet's plays it always seems that we ought to have an interpreter, a guide, a chorus, to explain to us what is going on in the minds of the various characters before they get ready

to take any definite action, and thus spare us the disappointed surprise which otherwise we are sure to feel when they do act before our eyes.

He remains, then, first of all, perhaps, a master of French prose, of a highly musical prose, lighted up with a dash of poetical radiance ; a careful and interested observer and describer of life, of that inner life which is called fancy, as well as of the outer life by which we are uninterruptedly surrounded ; a kindly and sincere humourist, and in many respects a creator of types. Posterity will lull itself in the mirth and poetry of his light sketches, read one or two, perhaps three, of his novels, and once in a while gaze with some wonder upon the features of the illustrious *Tartarin de Tarascon's* father.

Let us add here—for in forming an estimate of the man these facts ought not to be forgotten—that Daudet was not one of Fortune's *enfants gâtés*. His beginnings were as humble as well could be. It took him years of the hardest work so to master his natural gifts as to be able to turn them into agents of literary production. His first really great success he won when already thirty-four years of age, and ten years later he felt the first painful symptoms of the terrible ailment which has just carried him off. And yet he was a happy man, because he carried in himself, in his loving heart, and in his sympathy for everything that has received the inseparable gifts of life and suffering the source of his own and of his associates' happiness.



THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

CHAPTER I

ORPHANED

HE had been waiting a long time unnoticed. At length a door-keeper sauntered past him, lamp in hand, with that air of consequence so often assumed by those who have authority in very small things. Victor Eudeline coughed gently, partly perhaps to avoid the huskiness of anxiety, but chiefly to attract his attention, and apologetically asked him to be good enough to remind the Director that he was still waiting. The man nodded without turning his head and disappeared into the darkness between two double doors.

For over an hour he had been sitting on a comfortless box-seat in the long, narrow ante-chamber of the Lycée-Charlemagne, with its floors of dull, worn bricks and walls almost hidden by great geological charts. The late spring day was wearing to a close, and out through the windows he could see the long lines of gas-lights on the different floors rising round the gloomy courtyard which had for him more than one splendid memory.

There, three years in succession and again last summer, his two sons, Raymond and Antonin, had come out at the head of their classes and had given him the rapture of hearing that humble name of his—the name of a poor, working cabinet-maker who, by a combination of luck and pluck, had managed to make himself an employer—spoken of with pride and cheered to the echo. Ah, how different that dull courtyard looked then, filled with happy schoolboys and their friends and relatives in holiday dress and vocal with laughter and gay conversation ; and then his own progress through the crowd between his two sons, laden with laurels, their hearts full of the joy of success ; and the murmurs of admiration for them and this poor papa of theirs, with his short, tawny beard and shaven upper lip, almost bursting with the pride which seemed to make his glistening black frock-coat a size or two too small for him—Victor Eudeline, successor to Guillaume Aillaume, one of the biggest manufacturers in the Faubourg du Temple.

Then, later on, after the distribution of the prizes, the delight of getting into a carriage with his two boys, an open carriage, of course, so that the gilding on the crowns and on the bindings of their prizes could be properly seen, the ride through Paris, the innocent display along the boulevards on the way to visit his old friend Pierre Izoard at the Palais-Bourbon, and from there to call upon Mdle. Javel, his landlady, in her grand house on the Champs-Élysées.

“ The Director will see you now.”

The abruptly spoken words snatched Eudeline rudely out of his dream. He got up and followed the porter into an inner office, where a little old gentleman with a tasselled velvet skull-cap perched askew on his bald

cranium was sitting at a big writing-table just finishing a letter. He did not even look up at the great awkward figure in front of him as he began in a somewhat unpromising tone :

“ I hope, sir, that you have come to settle up with the Administration at last.”

“ Most unfortunately, no, Director. On the contrary, I have come to beg of you, nay, to implore you——”

And the poor fellow, put utterly out of countenance by this unexpected reception, stammered with a sort of sense of suffocation, and the blood came into his face, making a little purple patch on each of his cheeks.

“ Pardon me,” he murmured at length, gingerly laying down on the desk a ridiculously high and painfully new silk hat, which seemed to worry him almost as much as what he had come to say,—“ Pardon me, you have scarcely any knowledge of me, sir, and that only through my boys. I should have wished before I made my request to you to tell you something about myself and about my references.”

The Director was just holding up his hand in protest against a long and possibly wearisome story, but the word “ references ” checked him. In these democratic days very small people sometimes had very great patrons ; so he resigned himself to hear how Victor Eudeline, the self-made man, was born in the Rue de l'Orillon amidst the shavings of a carpenter's shop ; how, after two or three years at the primary school, he had been apprenticed to Guillaume Aillaume and had remained with him permanently, and how his master, after giving him his daughter, had left him his business, which, unhappily, had not prospered in his hands as it had done in his predecessor's.

“ But for all that, you can see, Director, that I am

not such a bad sort of fellow ; there is nothing about me to drive customers away. I am a bit noisy, it is true, perhaps a bit violent at times, and the blood gets into my head too quickly, but, after all, there is no real harm in me. I would n't injure a fly. I do own that I've got one fault, and a fault that has done me a good deal of harm ; I am too fond of building. Oh ! the money that I have spent in workshops, communal dwellings, workmen's cottages——"

The Director pushed back his cap with an irritable gesture, and he stopped, but, immediately after, the great man signed to him to go on, and he began again with added emphasis :

" But, in spite of all I could have got out of my difficulties with the help of my good friends and certain powerful personages—Pierre Izoard, for instance, sub-director of reporters in the Chamber, a splendid fellow, married to a most charming lady from Nice, a delightful woman, but unfortunately weak in the chest. But surely, sir, you must know him, my friend Izoard, an old University professor. He resigned in '52."

" Don't know him."

" But I also enjoyed the distinguished patronage of my landlady, Mdlle. Javel."

" A relation of the Deputy ? "

" Yes, sir ; the Under-Secretary of State to the Ministry of the Interior. She was his aunt. Ah, sir, what a noble creature she was, and as rich as she was generous ! She saw how hard I was striving to get my children educated, and to do a little good for my work-people ; so she became a true friend to us—to me and my wife. If the rent was a little behind it never mattered to her. Our lease was running out. She renewed it for fifteen years without a penny premium.

She even encouraged me in my unfortunate craze for building, and gave me the right to build a big workshop in my yard, the rent of which would almost have paid my own. The property was built, the agreement was signed, and I was just beginning to see my way clear when Mdlle. Javel died suddenly of—no, I forget what it was, and I am ignorant of medical terms. But she died, and there I found myself faced by her nephew and only heir—or I should say rather his agent, Maitre Petit-Sagnier, an Advocate in the Court of Appeal, who has treated me like a bandit, as a thief who had taken advantage of my old patroness, and has given me formal notice that the first quarter I am in arrears M. Marc Javel will cancel the lease and take possession of the property which I got by cheating from my dear, good lady ! ”

“ It seems to me that Maitre Petit-Sagnier has only been looking after the interests of his client. I don’t see how he can be blamed for that,” growled the Director, whose features had been visibly hardening for the last few moments.

Eudeline suddenly became very pale with that pinky pallor common to full-blooded men. He had difficulty in preventing himself from crying out, from being betrayed into some violence. He had taken a seat in obedience to a wave of the Director’s hand and now he sat opposite to him, gripping the edge of the writing-table with his short, hairy fingers. Then he went on very earnestly :

“ But think, sir, of all that I have done to keep myself from getting behind. I have sacrificed my wife’s last little bits of jewellery which she was keeping for our little daughter, her brilliants, her cashmere shawl. I have even ”—and here he paused for a moment as

though terrified by the enormity of the confession he was about to make—"I have even robbed my children of that education which I took such pride in giving them, not having had any myself. Ah yes, sir, I have done this, who, when I was only a little lad on the streets, used to come and stop outside the gates here and look in and envy these rich people's children who were being taught everything, I, who have suffered so much through my ignorance and took such pride in saying to myself: 'My boys shall be learned; they shall know Latin.' Think of my despair when I was forced to keep them at home for months so that I could save their class-money for the rent! I have wept and so has my wife—yes, we have wept together—to see them shuffling about in slippers from one room to the other, and then to think that all these sacrifices will have gone for nothing and that we shall be sold up all the same. Yes, that is what we have come to; we shall be sold up!"

Here his rising sobs seemed to choke him, but the Director made an impatient movement which recalled him to self-control and he went on:

"Oh no, sir, it is not that. Please do not think that I have come to ask you to lend me money. I have only come to ask an indulgence from you. The classes will soon begin their preparation for the Prize Essays. Will you not allow my boys to come to the Lycée on Composition-days? They are both sure of a nomination at the end of the year. Do not deprive them of that chance, sir, and do not take away from me the last joy that is left to me!"

"I regret that it is impossible, sir. It is never done. Your sons cannot join a full class until you have paid the term in arrears."



“ HE SAT OPPOSITE TO HIM, GRIPPING THE EDGE OF THE WRITING-TABLE WITH HIS SHORT, HAIRY FINGERS. ”

Gripping the edge of the writing-table with his two hands as tightly as he himself seemed to cling to his own idea, Eudeline insisted, supplicated. If not both, well, then, the elder, the elder only; he was already in his third year, the year of the Grand Competition; surely he might be allowed to enter with his old school-fellows!

The Director got up abruptly.

“The Administration could not possibly grant such a request.”

As he said this he pressed his thumb on the button of an electric bell which hung in front of him. Without waiting for the attendant, Eudeline bowed with the sad dignity of a broken man and went out.

Only a little while before as he had mounted the broad stone staircase when they were lighting the gas he had still some hope left, born of his trust in these learned pedagogues, of his almost idolatrous respect for those who knew Latin. He had not expected any material help from them, but only comforting words, consoling quotations from the classics; although his pride had recoiled for months from the step which he had just taken, he had still taken it with an absolute certainty of success, fortified against all his sorrows by the belief that Raymond would be able to enter for the Grand Competition and that, for the first time, the arches of the Sorbonne would ring with the name of Eudeline.

Now this hope had been shattered, and he had come to the end of all things. Among so many catastrophes there could be no doubt of that. Where in all the world was he to find the money for the two terms?

As he passed out of the gate of the Lycée-Charlemagne a name came into his mind—Pierre Izoard, his

old friend to whom he had not dared to confess that his boys had not been to school for three months. But difficulties rose up instantly. Izoard had gone to take his wife to Nice and was probably not back yet. And then look what he already owed him : his men's wages for the last month, and ten thousand francs for the new building. No, no, he must look elsewhere. But where ? At whose door could he knock ?

All at once the soft freshness of the fine drizzling rain on his hair and his burning temples reminded him that he was still carrying his hat in his hand. Ah, that old Robert Macaire with his door-keeper's cap, what a wonder it was that he had not pitched his writing-table with its huge ink-pots and papers and note-books and blotting-pads on top of him ! If he had angered him only a little more he would have done it.

Eudeline still felt his hands damp and his knees shaking with this long-suppressed anger. The pavement was wet and glistening, and he rolled a little in his walk along it, as he had done for the first and only time in his life when he had taken a drop too much at the Commercial Travellers' banquet at which this same M. Marc Javel had taken the chair. The Under-Secretary had been in most excellent form that night, his fine chest had swelled under his white waistcoat inflated by the sonorous phrases which he delivered with trembling eyelids and tears in his voice—phrases which had set forth the duty of every good Frenchman to give rein at such a time to his most charitable instincts. Perhaps, after all, this young Deputy for the Indre et Loire might believe in that human brotherhood concerning which he had perorated so eloquently, and Eudeline did not forget that it was his agent, his lawyer, this Petit-Sagnier, and not himself, who had put in force

against him a measure so ferocious as the sale which he had announced for Saturday afternoon.

“ Why should n’t I go to him, to Marc Javel himself, at his house in the Rue de la Ville l’Evêque ? Suppose I was to go and ask mercy from him and not from this agent of his. Why should n’t I ? ”

Eudeline thought of this as he was crossing the yard of his factory. The workmen were just leaving, and the buildings were all dark save for one jet of gas that was still burning in the counting-house. As he went in he stopped for a moment at the foot of the staircase in front of the porter’s box.

“ Something for you, M. Eudeline,” said the concierge in that mournful, far-away sort of voice so often assumed by employees when they know that the business from which they draw their wages is getting shaky.

He took the two papers with a passing glance at the wrinkled, inquiring face which seemed to ask him so many dumb questions and went up the stairs to the counting-house to look at the two letters. One was the formal notice of the sale ; the other he opened with careless fingers, read a line or so, and then—were his eyes playing him false ?—summoned for eleven o’clock the following day before the Juge d’Instruction. Great God, could that be true ! Yes, yes, he had forgotten that. It seemed to him as though the whole building were falling to pieces about him. He shivered and said twice over, loud enough for the man downstairs to hear him :

“ Well, now it is death, yes, death, there is nothing left but that.”

He went on into his own office, saying good-night to his cashier as he passed his desk, and there he shut

himself in. It was just getting daylight when he came out to go to his own apartments. He had spent the whole night writing two letters, which no doubt he had begun and rewritten over and over again. One of these letters, or, as it might perhaps be more correct to say, one of these dying declarations, ran as follows :

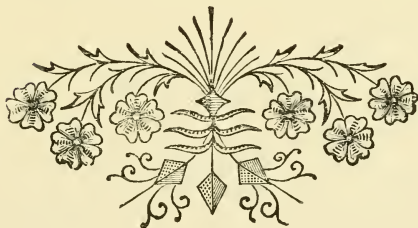
“ MY DEAR FRIEND PIERRE :

“ Now that the Easter recess is over and the Chamber is sitting again, I suppose that you have been obliged to leave your dear invalid at Nice, and that this letter, telling you of my death, will find you on your return to the Palais-Bourbon. Yes, of my death ; you have read correctly. Circumstances which I could neither foresee nor control have compelled me to hurry myself out of the world. My poor wife will tell you, if she can, the motives which have driven me to this deed of despair. As for me, I dare not. I should be ashamed to tell you how deeply your friend, once a true man of '48, has dishonoured his name. And yet I did not like to die without thanking you and asking your pardon. Ah yes, and, above all, pardon for that last ten thousand francs which you lent me and which disappears with me. If Marc Javel, my new landlord, is an honest man he will repay you this money on account of the new buildings which you have paid for and he will get the rents of. I am writing to him to-night and I most sincerely trust that he will remember this and will also help you to get something for my boys from the Government so that they may finish their studies—God help them ! Above all things I pray for this for Raymond, my eldest, the one who must take my place and, after I am gone, be the head, the support of the family. And this, too, I beseech you, my old friend ;

let him finish his education and never let him go into business. Business is worse than the galleys ; every day you are in it you must run the risk of ruin and dishonour ; may one, at least, of my two boys escape it ! Now that I have asked this, my old friend, I embrace you for the last time and thank Madame Izoard and Mdlle. Genevieve for all their kindnesses to my wife and little Dina. You can think how it breaks my heart to tear myself away like this from my little world. Still it is necessary. My life is the price of their happiness.

“ Long live the social and democratic Republic !

“ VICTOR EUDELINÉ.”





CHAPTER II

BENEFACTORS

PIERRE IZOARD had come back the night before to the little official residence which the absence of his wife and daughter seemed to have transformed into a vast solitude. He went and sat down alone at a table before a window opening on to the interior court of the Palace paved with great flag-stones where he could hear the clink and rattle of glasses and plates, which showed that the other clerks and officials were at breakfast. Presently one of the messengers brought up to him a letter.

Without waiting to reach the signature he jumped up, flung away his napkin, and gathered together all the money that there was in the house. A minute or two later in the first cab which passed along the Rue de Bourgogne, the little, close-cropped man with black, bushy eyebrows and big, flowing, iron-grey beard, was being driven at full speed towards the Boulevard du Temple, gesticulating vigorously and exclaiming in a strong southern accent amidst the rattle of the wheels over the stones :

“Eudeline take his own life ! Eudeline disgrace his name ! That—no, I shall want to see that before I believe it.”

All the way along the Faubourg, the slope of which was swarming with a busy, noisy crowd, between the lines of venders of fruit and flowers, fish and vegetables, who had drawn up their barrows alongside the pavement, amidst the smell of hot bread and fried fish, the bustling and shouts of work-girls in their aprons and of workmen with bare breasts carrying a loaf of bread under one arm and a greasy paper in the hand—each turn of the wheels confirmed Pierre Izoard in his cheerful belief.

Twelve o'clock was sounding from the church steeples and in the yards of the manufactories; noon, the hour of hunger, the eating-time which gave to every face in the street the same anxious look of fixed desire and made human eyes seem like those of a dog-fish chasing its prey. Kill himself forsooth! As for breakfast, it could wait. Nevertheless, when he got out of the cab and saw above the gateway leading into Eudeline's yard a new wooden sign which read, "These Extensive Premises to Let," the good little man felt a chill at his warm heart. He had believed that the workshops were still occupied. What with his wife's illness and his journey, he had not been there for some time now. He was still more disturbed when an apprentice crossing the yard, bareheaded and whistling, informed him that the master had been away since the morning, and that no one had seen him come back. So his hand trembled a little when he pulled the bell on the first floor which his friend had occupied.

In the little entrance-hall, three steps up from the landing, he was met by a tall, fair-haired lad of fourteen or fifteen, frightened and miserable, and with cheeks wet with tears.

"Well, Raymond, and what is the matter?" he asked.

Instead of replying the lad took him by the sleeve and drew him up the passage, and there he let his head fall upon his shoulder, with a deep sob.

"Where is papa, M. Izoard? Tell us where papa is."

At the same moment Izoard felt kisses and hot tears falling on his hand. It was the other boy, Tonin, a ruddy little fellow who had run up from the basement to ask him where his father was, his very teeth rattling with nervous terror. And Izoard, overcome by the sight of such genuine grief, wiped his eyes and tried to find some words to say to them.

"But, my dear boys, how can I know where your father is? I have only just come back from the South. I came here quite by chance."

A few moments afterwards, sitting between the two brothers amidst the disorder and nakedness of the room into which they had pulled him, he managed at last to disentangle from their sobs and incoherent phrases the story of the tragedy which he was now forced to believe in.

Their father had spent the whole night in his office. In the morning they had been awakened by the noise of some terrible scene in their parents' room; their father had shouted out that he was going to throw himself into the canal, that there was nothing else to do but that, and afterwards he had run out with their mother behind him, weeping and imploring him with clasped hands not to die. Since then the two lads had been there waiting without knowing anything that had happened.

Izoard tried to comfort them. He knew their father so well, so punctual and business-like, violent, perhaps, but still tenderly attached to them and their mother.

What catastrophe could possibly have driven him to such a fearful determination ?

“ Catastrophe, M. Izoard ! ”

It was the elder who spoke with that strange, old-fashioned air which the precocity of grief lends to children.

“ We have had plenty of them since you went away. Look, the clock is gone and the curtains too ; there is hardly any furniture left. God knows what we have n’t sold and pawned to pay this dreadful rent ! It was Tonin who took the things to the pawn-shop. I dare n’t go, and papa and mamma were too well known. But after all, that is nothing now. Can you believe it, M. Izoard, that we have not been to school for three months ? ”

Without waistcoats or ties and with nothing on their feet but slippers, the two lads looked for all the world like a couple of lazy, good-for-nothing truants.

“ It was keeping us away from school that grieved him more than even sending Dina away to Cherbourg to her godmother who had promised to take care of her. Ah, there is mamma ! ”

They did not even give her time to sit down or to lift her veil from her hot, dry lips and cold, white cheeks.

“ What have you done with papa ? ” they both asked in a breath.

“ Well, my children, your father—your father—— ”

She had prepared herself to lie to them rather than to let the blow fall too suddenly upon them, but the unexpected and yet friendly and pitying presence of Izoard robbed her of the last remnant of her courage. She knew about her husband’s letter, and she knew, too, that a single word passing between them would be enough to make her break down and tell everything,

so she contented herself with an unspoken greeting and went on as though he were not there :

“ I have left your father much calmer. I hope we shall have nothing more to fear about him to-day.”

And then the poor woman had to turn her head away to escape the suspicious looks which seemed to stab her like daggers.

“ But why have you left him, Mamma ? ” asked Raymond, distrustfully, almost severely.

The mother bent her head and replied very softly, very humbly, as though she were in the presence of her husband, or rather as though his eldest son had already replaced him in authority :

“ So that I could come sooner and comfort you, my dears——”

And then to escape any more questions she turned and said to Izoard with a broken-hearted look which confessed everything :

“ Ah, M. Marc Javel is very cruel to us.”

“ That I can hardly believe,” exclaimed the little man. “ Javel ? No, we are very good friends in the Chamber. He is one of the best of Republicans, a son of the people, born in the middle class. He knows all its trials and troubles. In 1870, during the siege, I heard him speaking at a public meeting on the renewing of credits and he moved the whole audience almost to tears with a few words on the agony caused by the slavery of debt. A man who could speak such words would be the most abominable hypocrite—but never mind that, Madame Eudeline, I have a cab at the door, let the boys come with me and we will go straight to the Under-Secretary. I am certain that he knows nothing about your being sold up, and in any case I will answer for it that the sale shall not take place.”

"God hears you, my friend," sighed the mother. And then, without daring to look at her sons, she told them to go and get ready as quickly as possible.

When their backs were turned, the sob which she had been choking back burst out :

"Poor boys, my poor boys !" she murmured, covering her face with her hands.

Izoard had seated himself on the edge of the sofa on which she had thrown herself. He scarcely dare ask now : was it possible, had her husband really carried out his threat ?

She made a sign of assent, her face still hidden by her cotton gloves.

He looked at her astounded.

"But were n't you there ? You would not have let him do it, and, besides, people don't kill themselves for want of money. See, I have brought him some myself—not very much, certainly, but still something."

While he was speaking and punctuating his sentences with vigorous gestures, the wretched woman could do nothing but shake her head.

"Ah, M. Izoard, if you only knew——"

Then all of a sudden he remembered the betrayal of honour of which Eudeline's letter had spoken. Well, but after all what was it ? Surely she could tell an old friend like him everything.

"Very well, then, if I must tell you, listen."

Then with bowed head like a penitent in the Confessional she sobbed out in broken tones the piteous story which poor Eudeline had told her as they were walking along the towing-path of the canal. Alas ! it was all part of the same misery, that terrible rent, that ever-growing fear of Marc Javel. Some goods, building materials for some forthcoming works, had been

deposited in the yard. Money had been raised upon them just at the end of the quarter. Then, as nothing was forthcoming to redeem them, they had been sold. After that came an inquiry from the owners; then the information to the police, and then the summons from the Juge d'Instruction—after which would come imprisonment at Mazas and dishonour for him and his family.

“ Ah, my friend, it was that which crushed him, the dreadful thought that our little ones would one day blush at the sound of his name, and that honest folk like you would not dare to receive them into their houses. ‘ If I die,’ he said to me, ‘ the prosecution will be stopped, and our children’s name will not be sullied by the stain of crime.’ I did all I could to turn him away from his dreadful purpose. I implored him for my sake, for the children’s, not to kill himself, but he talked so reasonably, so forcibly, he gave me so many reasons to prove that his death was, after all, the only means of saving him from prison and us from infamy. At last I had not a word left to say to him. You know how violent, how masterful, he always was. Yes, you know. I ought to have cried out, to have clung to him, but I was stunned with horror and half fainting. Then he said to me all of a sudden : ‘ Come, little mother, give me a kiss and go back to your children.’ And I did it, just because he told me to—and the next moment there I was alone—I did n’t even know—ah, God help you, my poor husband! ”

Just then the boys came back, and she stopped and made an agitated survey of their clothes while Izoard pondered in dumb astonishment on this heroic suicide so weakly and simply acquiesced in by this unhappy helot of the hearth, for she had proved herself to be that and little more.

“ At least, let us hope that the poor fellow’s death will one day or another be of some service to his children,” he said to himself on his way with the two boys towards the Rue de la Ville l’Évêque where the Under-Secretary lived in a handsome old house with a garden at the entrance to the Ministerial buildings.

Now it must be remembered that the sub-director of reporters in the Chamber edits the reports of its sittings for publication and embroiders them with : “ Cheers from the Right,” “ Murmurs from the Left,” “ Sensation in certain quarters,” “ Prolonged applause,” and so forth, and one can easily understand that it is very much to the interest of honourable members to stand well with him. At any rate, M. Izoard felt pretty certain that when the Under-Secretary received his card, even though he happened to be at breakfast at the time, he would not keep him waiting very long and much less would he think of putting him off till another day, as he would not have hesitated to do with many a more highly placed official than himself.

Scarcely had they been ushered into a study such as they had never seen before—that of the Director of the Lycée merely looked like a waiting-room in comparison with it—a magnificent room as lofty as a church, with long, narrow, painted windows, carpets that their feet sunk into, chairs and sofas in oak and leather placed at an imposing distance from each other, than the boys, already frightened, fell into utter confusion when they saw a tall gentleman of imposing presence and expansive manner, with ruddy complexion and a fair, carefully trained moustache, and dressed in a dark suit of English cloth, come towards them, his hands outstretched, with a table-napkin thrown over his left arm, just as a hint that he had been disturbed at his meal.

“ My dear sir, may I ask to what I am indebted for this welcome visit ? ”

Izoard made a motion with his hand towards the two boys and said :

“ These, Mr. Secretary, are the sons of your tenant, M. Eudeline.”

Instantly M. Javel's smile vanished, the corners of his mouth and his eyes came down. He paled a little, and looking at them under his down-drawn eyelids he began to murmur a few phrases, half apologetic, half explanatory. That very morning he had received a very peculiar letter from M. Eudeline, one of those high-flown communications which men in such a position as his so often receive. He had sent it to his agent, Petit-Sagnier, who had the administration of the estate in his hands, and here was the telegram which he had just received from him in reply. The Under-Secretary handed the despatch to Izoard with a discreet air of secrecy, but he said quickly :

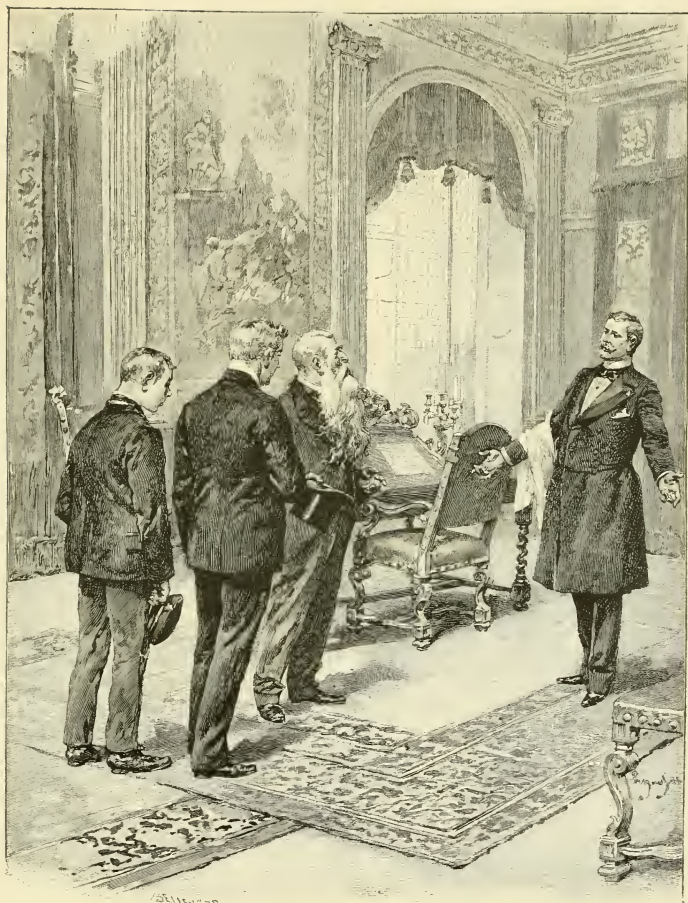
“ Alas ! there is no need to hide anything from the boys.”

Then he read aloud :

“ Do not believe a word about suicide. Shows a desire to play same game with nephew as with aunt. Shall have sale Saturday afternoon as arranged.

“ PETIT-SAGNIER.”

The two lads had taken refuge in a corner, but as they heard this, both of them, impelled by the same angry, indignant impulse, sprang out of their half concealment. Both tried to speak at once, but Tonin, the younger, could do nothing but gesticulate as his anger bade him. A sort of nervous contraction of the throat seemed to choke his words back as he strove to



“ A TABLE-NAPKIN THROWN OVER HIS LEFT ARM, JUST AS A HINT THAT HE HAD BEEN
DISTURBED AT HIS MEAL.”

get them out between his clenched, grinding teeth. Raymond was hardly more eloquent, his voice was just breaking, and altogether he was only an overgrown hobbledehoy. But still, as a defender was needed for one who could no longer defend himself from such a false accusation, the lad saw his duty and did it. No, their father was not an impostor ; he had killed himself certainly, but then he had done it because he wanted to do so ; he had killed himself to escape just such persecutors as this Petit-Sagnier and others like him. Yes, that was it, and he would tell it everywhere, and he would write it out and send it to the papers ; yes, people should see——

“ Their father is dead, Monsieur Secretary, although the news has not really been broken to them yet,” murmured M. Izoard, somewhat disconcerted by this impetuous outburst. But a faint smile of pity on the lips of M. Marc Javel at once reassured him and, convinced that the highly placed functionary was as much moved as himself, he did not try to repress two big tears which the agitation of the boys had forced into the corners of his eyes.

And yet what a mistake for a poor little man to make ! Just as though a man versed as this one was in the ways of the world and high politics, rich, comfortable, and dressed in the finest of English cloth, could find time to bother himself for a moment about a poor little domestic tragedy like this.

But this boy had spoken of the newspapers, and Monsieur Secretary as a politician stood to some extent in wholesome awe of the Paris journalists. A nice sort of story they could make out of “ Marc Javel’s Inheritance.” How luridly they could draw the suicide of Victor Eudeline ; with what pathos could they de-

scribe the visit of his children to his house in the Rue de la Ville l'Evêque ! A very pretty piece of scandal that would be ! No, this brutality of Petit-Sagnier must be neutralised as quickly as possible. Happily M. Izoard was there, a babbler of the most beneficent sort. He went towards him with his right hand outstretched and wide-open :

" My dear sir "—Marc Javel called everybody " sir," unless he could give them a higher title—" My dear sir, I thank you most heartily for having brought these two young gentlemen here and for the opportunity that you have given me of repairing a gross injustice."

Then he went on, addressing the stupefied Raymond with an infinite gentleness of tone :

" My dear young friend, I do not know whether or not your father has really put this terrible resolution into effect. I venture even yet to hope that you may find him still among you, but in any case tell your mother from me that, if lawyers have one sort of language, honest men have another sort. You will not be sold up on Saturday afternoon, nor on any other Saturday. Tell her that from me."

" I knew it ! I knew it ! Marc Javel could not do anything else ! " cried Izoard, only restraining himself with great difficulty from flinging his arms round the Secretary's neck as he concluded this touching little oration.

As a matter of fact, it was not the sale that took place on Saturday, but the funeral of Victor Eudeline, whose body had been recovered from the canal after an immersion of several hours. The obsequies, of which Izoard paid the expenses, were everything that could be desired. They were very numerously attended, mainly by workmen and small shopkeepers of the

neighbourhood. The great houses had not thought much of the successor of Aillaume with his humanitarian and socialistic theories, but who cared about their absence when it became known that the Under-Secretary for the Interior was going to accompany the cortege to the cemetery ?

M. Marc Javel had recognised that, in order to diminish the unpleasant effect of the suicide on the public mind, he could n't do better than to attend the funeral of his victim, and he was even clever enough to take with him as a sort of scapegoat his agent, Petit-Sagnier, quite a typical well-to-do lawyer of the family solicitor type whom the work-people of the factory instinctively received with frowning faces and half-suppressed groans. As for Marc himself, however, when they saw him get out of his official carriage, black-gloved and dressed with the most perfect propriety, at the door of this out-of-the way suburban church, a thrill of sympathy instantly ran through the crowd.

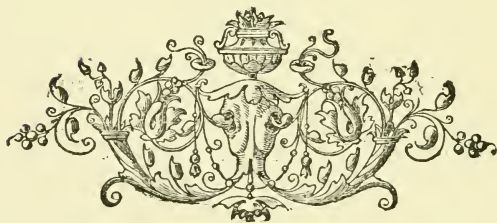
Pierre Izoard and the boys, who were waiting for him under the porch, knowing that as a Freemason he never entered a church, approached him almost choking with tears to thank him for his presence.

"*Fortitudo animi !*" said Izoard in a low tone, as he pointed to the catafalque surrounded by candles in the porch. His emotion seemed to have called up some memory of his professorial days. The Minister knew no Latin and shunned it as if it had been a disease, but he was able to make a shot at the *fortitudo* as an allusion to the heroic death of this father who had died for his children ; and, as Raymond happened to be standing quite close to him, he folded him to his breast, with an eloquent gesture of adoption.

"My children," he said in a full soft voice which

was audible for some considerable distance, "your father was one of those good old Republicans to whom the Government of the Republic cannot refuse anything. Everything that Victor Eudeline has asked for his son Raymond, eldest son of his widow and now the head of his family, in that letter of his, written on the threshold of the tomb, shall be granted. I take it upon myself as a solemn responsibility in the presence of all those who now hear me."

And there were many there who did hear him.





CHAPTER III

A BOY'S BURDEN

FROM the date of his tenant's funeral dated the first decisive advance of Marc Javel along that broad path of popularity which leads to the high places of politics, which, as everybody knows, he has approached with almost unexampled rapidity. From that day, too, Raymond assumed his new character as the head of the family. He discovered that its responsibilities and demands gained him a sort of pity and deference with which he saw himself suddenly surrounded as he walked behind the hearse with his brother. Naturally the death of this father of his, so good and kind in spite of all his fits of violence, affected him very deeply, but still his sorrow was tempered by a strange sort of pride which even caused him to pose a little. He no longer wept like a child, as Tonin did ; he walked with rounded back in an attitude that was at once mournful and impressive.

He seemed to keep up this attitude, morose beyond his years, a sensibility always a little exaggerated and perhaps a trifle fictitious, during the three or four years which he passed as bursar at Louis-le-Grand, where he finished his classes. His story, which gradually became known in the Lycée, and, above all, the favour

of the Minister, to whom everyone knew that he owed his birthright, made him a celebrity. In the reception-room the pupils pointed him out to their relations.

" You see that tall, fair fellow of the Third Class? He 's only fifteen and he is already ' Head of the Family.' "

And the Superintendent, whom the mothers asked in their turn, replied with a mysterious murmur :

" A young gentleman under very distinguished protection ! "

As usual, this protection was a good deal more illusory than effective. A few weeks after Eudeline's funeral the Under-Secretary paid a visit to the widow, who was greatly flattered by the attention, and received him and his agent, Petit-Sagnier, in the same room in which the despairing man had passed his night of agony. Pierre Izoard and the cashier, M. Alexis, by the express request of Marc Javel, were also present at this family council which had been convoked by Madame Eudeline in view of the impossibility of carrying on her husband's business.

A nature at once gentle, dreamy, and unstable, the want of a mother's guiding hand in her youth, a convent education completed by a romantically minded governess in the solitude of the Chateau de Morangis to which her widowed father had retired, had totally unfitted her for the exercise of that feminine activity and intelligence which has made so many fortunes in Paris. She had neither taste nor talent for business, and she had taken a horror of it from her husband's troubles. It will be enough to say that during her eighteen years of fairly happy married life she had not entered these offices where they were holding council more than twice. One can easily understand how, un-

fitted as she was and burdened with her young children, the unhappy woman recoiled from the task of carrying on the business whose dangers and embarrassments the cashier was never weary of descanting upon, mostly for the sake of proving the extreme regularity and clearness of his own books.

The business had certainly plenty of customers, but it was already somewhat out of date. It was terribly disorganised, and there were a great number of bad debts and others which the collectors would probably never pay, to say nothing of bills that were overdue and the rent in arrears. How was it possible for her to make her way through such confusion as this? How could she escape from all these accumulated difficulties? She might sell the good-will certainly, but in order to do that it would first be necessary to clear off the liabilities. If that was not done where would it be possible to find a buyer for a business which might be described as being as leaky as a basket?

M. Alexis kept on reviewing the matter over and over again in his cold-blooded fashion, and all the while Izoard and Madame Eudeline looked at each other puzzled and helpless. All of a sudden Petit-Sagnier caught a sign from his illustrious client and said abruptly :

“ Well, I think that perhaps, after all, I can find a purchaser.”

Then he went on to say that he had discovered a firm of dealers in such commodities, the Brothers Nathan, who would take over the whole concern, debts and all——

“ And the buildings and all the fixtures in the yard as well ? ” asked Izoard with a quick upward look at him.

The lawyer suddenly opened his arms with a gesture as though he were letting the whole affair fall to the ground. No, the Nathans had said nothing about those new workshops, which, after all, simply shut out the air and light and took up a lot of space in a yard that was already too small. He was sure that they would be only too glad to be rid of them. At this Madame Eudeline's tears were on the point of breaking out again. What, would they not even pay the mere price of the buildings—the ten thousand francs that an old friend had advanced? The fat little lawyer stuck out his lips in a deprecating sort of way. Unhappily that was one of the very many errors into which poor M. Eudeline had been betrayed. It was most unfortunate that he should have had such a mania for building.

“Please do not think any more of that, my dear friend,” said Izoard, nodding smilingly towards her. “That creditor is by no means in a hurry to get his money back again.”

Marc Javel looked up and said with a good-natured smile :

“Then I presume this old friend is fairly well-to-do?”

“A man in about the same position as myself, Mr. Secretary,” said Izoard, a trifle disconcerted.

“Then in that case, my dear sir——”

The Minister already held in his hand a tasty little shark-skin pocket-book and as he was speaking he took a loose cheque out of it. He put it on the edge of the writing-table, borrowed a pen from M. Alexis, thanking him as though he had conferred quite an obligation on him, filled it up, and handed it to Izoard.

“There,” he continued, “at any rate, this good

friend shall not lose the whole or such a large amount."

It was for five thousand francs and, although he blushed like a child when he saw it, he replied after a moment's reflection :

" Well, well, yes, I will accept it on behalf of Madame Eudeline, who, I am afraid, will soon find herself worse off by a good deal than either my friend or myself."

The poor woman did not know which way to look.

She already owed so much to this good-hearted Marc Javel. Only a few days before, he had procured the bursary for Raymond and just afterwards he had given her a letter of introduction to Esprit-Cornat, a former member of the Constituent Assembly, and now manager of a large firm of electrical engineers to whom Pierre Izoard had just apprenticed Antonin, and here, on the top of all this, he was practically making them a present of five thousand francs.

" Madame, if you please—really it is the greatest favour to me," murmured Marc Javel in a tone so gentle that it seemed almost paternal.

And after that she could do nothing but accept it.

Later on, while the Minister's coupé was rattling down the muddy slope of the suburb, M. Petit-Sagnier took upon himself to chide his client for this utterly useless piece of generosity :

" What on earth should you do that for ? I had got the affair arranged to perfection ; I had freed you from a distinctly awkward position. I had got rid of most undesirable tenants and I had practically made you a present of an excellent factory, stock in trade and all, and here you go and spoil a masterpiece of management like that by making a present of five thousand francs to

the very people who are already so enormously indebted to you. Bah ! ”

“ My dear Petit-Sagnier,” said the Minister, sniffing delicately at a cigar about the same colour as his moustache and about as exactly and carefully rolled, “ I am not very much in love with business which looks so beautifully cut and dried as that, and I am always rather suspicious of things which don’t cost me anything—not that I blame you in the slightest ; it is your business to make the most of what my poor aunt has left me, but you must remember that I have my political career to look after.”

“ And, my dear sir,” said the lawyer with a respectful smile, “ I am delighted to be able to congratulate you most heartily on the proof that you have just given of your ability to look after your own interests in that respect.”

Until the last half-hour or so, he had looked upon his client merely as a man who was naturally pleased at coming into a handsome inheritance and who was just then inclined to be generous. Now he felt inclined to change his opinion, and began to look upon his client as a very much cleverer man than he had taken him for.

To poor Madame Eudeline the five thousand francs were a perfect godsend, as they not only enabled her to live a little less sparingly in her temporary refuge with her sister-in-law at Cherbourg until Raymond should be in fact as well as in name the head of his family, but also to send a little present every now and then to the scholar at Louis-le-Grand and to M. Esprit-Cornat’s apprentice.

The letters which she wrote to her boys, and especially to the elder, were full of the future and of gentle

complaint of the exile to which the mother and daughter were now condemned, for so many weary years, and at the end of every letter came the one unvarying, appealing postscript : " Work, my son, work, and release us as soon as you can ! "

And the poor lad worked, worked on steadily, constantly, almost desperately, and yet by some extraordinary mischance he, the brilliant scholar who only a short time before had carried off every class prize that he could win at the Lycée-Charlemagne, now that he had a definite object which he was toiling with his whole soul to attain, failed even to get a nomination at the end of the year. His masters, knowing how hard he worked and what efforts he made, attributed this strange falling off in ability to the natural weakness of a growing lad, while Izoard explained it by the nervous shock that he had sustained through the tragic death of his father.

" Just look at Antonin," he said one day when he was talking about the boys to M. Marc Javel in one of the corridors of the House. " Since poor Eudeline's suicide the little fellow has become quite a stutterer. He used to speak so readily and now he seems always hesitating, looking for words. It is quite possible that the same thing that has affected him in this way has affected Raymond intellectually."

" Quite possible, my dear sir, quite possible," he replied with his unfailing good-humour, " but still you know that sort of thing can be cured. Bring him to see me on Sunday and we will see what can be done. Don't forget, now. I shall be very pleased to see my young friend again."

Izoard was not very likely to fail in such a thing as this, but it so happened that in all the countless visits

that he paid to his protector at the Ministry of the Interior or the Treasury or the Board of Trade, through which M. Marc Javel passed as stages in his rapid elevation, the bursar of Louis-le-Grand saw him altogether twice, and then only for five minutes or so at a time, and merely to hear over again the same sort of benediction that he had heard under the porch of St. Joseph's, the same undertakings in the name of the Government towards the eldest son of the widow and the head of the family. "Do not forget that, young man," he said with paternal gravity. But it never came to anything more than that.

It would have been infinitely better for the lad himself if he could have been able to utterly forget these terrible and ever-pressing responsibilities, for the idea that in the end he might not be able to bear the burden which was being laid upon him had the almost inevitable effect of paralysing his efforts by destroying that buoyancy of youth which had before been the source of the strength that had won his earlier triumphs.

On one occasion two of the classes of the Lycée were taken to see a matinée of *Hamlet* at the Théâtre-Français. Raymond had never seen the play before, and it seemed to inspire him with a sort of despair, a little theatrical and exaggerated, perhaps, but in the main genuine. As they were going back from the theatre he confided the reasons for this to the school-fellow who was walking beside him.

"I pity this Prince of Denmark and I weep for him as I would for one of ourselves, and that is just because he is like myself, Marques, because he has, just as I have, a task which is quite beyond his strength, which he thinks about every moment of his life, and which robs him of all pleasure in living. He seems to have

no right to be young or to love and be loved or have any of the enjoyments of his age. He feels that he has got to be a hero and an avenger, and yet he knows that he is not strong enough. That is the sort of thing that crushes your very soul within you."

This little confidence the school-fellow confided in turn to his mother, who was the wife of one of the Ministers and had been somewhat of a beauty in her time,—in fact she was still called "La Belle Marques,"—and it aroused within her the liveliest interest in this tall lad who had such a romantic soul and such a beautiful head of soft, fair hair. This curiosity was, however, fated not to be gratified just yet, for Raymond seemed to have made up his mind to see nobody and accept no invitations. His Sundays were passed either at the Palais-Bourbon with Izoard or, more often, at Morangis, a little suburban village where the little man had lived for a portion of the year ever since his wife's illness. Guillaume Aillaume, now retired from business, lived here too and the two families had become good friends as well as neighbours.

Formerly every Saturday Izoard and Eudeline got out of the train at Antony, and, leaving Madame Eudeline to follow on with her daughter in the omnibus, walked through the long shady avenues which crossed the great plain lying between La Belle-Épine and the tower of Montlhéry. It was an ever new delight for the native of the Faubourg to walk for an hour or so between hedges of hawthorns and pear-trees on the arm of the old stenographer while he revealed the secrets of the Chamber and expounded the mysteries of the lobbies in his deep, almost thunderous, voice, and Raymond and Antonin tossed their class-books and exercises about over the grass and beet-root

fields and mingled their joyous cries with the songs of the mountain larks far up in the sky, invisible amidst the glory of the setting sun.

At the entrance to Morangis, where three roads crossed, there stood in the middle of a little area of grass a tall Italian poplar which had a political past and which M. Aillaume, who had owned property in the neighbourhood since '48 and before, could remember having seen stripped of its branches, painted with the red, white, and blue, and solemnly baptised "The Tree of Liberty" by the then Curé of the parish. It was at this tree, which had now in the course of nature made a modest return to civil life, that the Parisians were accustomed to meet Izoard every Saturday night, fussing about a camp-chair in which lay his invalid wife smothered in shawls, and with them old Guillaume Aillaume with a face like a mask of Voltaire retouched by Labiche, with a snuff-box in his hand and a good pinch between his finger and thumb, waiting for the coming of his two favourites.

They would linger there for a few minutes talking politics to very little purpose, for they belonged to two utterly different generations, each with its own way of thinking and even of speaking. Then, when the evening wind began to make the tall poplar rustle, Genevieve would begin to get anxious about her mother and give the signal. Then they would make a start and the invalid would move slowly away between her husband and her daughter towards the old hunting-box in which they lived, while Père Aillaume would march off in the opposite direction at the head of the Eudeline family towards the chateau which one could see rising big and black with its façade flanked by two great tulip-trees and all its windows aflame with the setting sun



"THE INVALID WOULD MOVE SLOWLY AWAY BETWEEN HER HUSBAND AND HER DAUGHTER."

and looking like a blazing building kept from destruction by some magic.

Year after year the Tree of Liberty had put forth more and more branches, and had seen this little group of friends meet beneath it every Saturday afternoon. Then first old Aillaume was missing, then Victor Eudeline, and then poor Madame Izoard went to hush her eternal complaining in the cemetery at Nice. Then finally Madame Eudeline and Dina went away into the exile which bade fair to last a good while yet.

At last, one night when the old stenographer arrived from Paris there was no one to meet him but his daughter Genevieve in deep mourning and her friend Casta, whose real name was Sophia Castagnozoff, a little, squat, spectacled, blue-stockings daughter of a big corn merchant of Odessa, who had come to study medicine in Paris against the wishes of her people, and was living and paying her fees by teaching all sorts of languages, dead and living, and several other subjects which her vast memory and quick intelligence had made her the mistress of.

Pierre Izoard, who, as it happened, did not share the views of his friend and master, J. B. Proudhon, on the subject of the feminine brain, had tried with her assistance to give his daughter just as complete a classical education as a boy would have. But her mother's illness and the constant journeys to the South had prevented Genevieve from gaining the two University degrees which her father had longed to see her win. When she came back from the South, alone and looking very pale in her deep mourning, with white face, crimson lips, and burning eyes, her friends became anxious. She ought to live in the country and abjure all fatigue, and Sophia began to come more as a friend

than as a doctor to the little house at Morangis where she found some echo of her own views of ideal justice and universal freedom.

However, Genevieve, though her studies had been so much interrupted, knew quite enough to be able to look after Raymond's lessons, revise his Latin, and even his mathematics, and so she used to send the romantic young scholar away to dream the whole week over those enchanted Sunday afternoons which he passed in a corner of the dining-room at Morangis, with this tall, grave sister whom the children had christened Tantine—the little aunt ; she with an open Virgil on her lap and he with his eyes half on his exercise-book and half on her.





CHAPTER IV

A BOY'S FANCY

RAYMOND was getting on for eighteen now and was beginning the study of philosophy and to learn how to use those mystic keys with which Kant and Schopenhauer profess to open all the mysteries of life and the human soul. Already almost crushed under the weight of the duties and rights of which he now habitually exaggerated the responsibilities, this new study had the effect of plunging him into still darker depths. The professor under whom he studied was a mere logic-grinder and he seemed to grind out nothing but the logic of despair. When his pupils had left his classes they seemed to speak of nothing among themselves but suicide and death and of the ugliness of existence and the nothingness of everything. And yet strangely enough this year of philosophy which began one Sunday in October, 1883, was the brightest and best remembered in all the grey, colourless youth of the bursar of Louis-le-Grand.

On this particular morning Genevieve and her friend Casta, who had arrived at Morangis the night before, were waiting at the cross-roads by the Tree of Liberty for Izoard, who had gone to meet Raymond at the station. Seated on the brown, worn grass with her

back against the great poplar, already half stripped of its leaves by the autumn wind, the student was burying her spectacles and her broad Calmuck nose in a book of notes which she was not reading, while Genevieve trotted from one road to the other knocking stones about with the end of her umbrella or drawing circles and lines in the dust with all the unconscious application of distraction and impatience.

The contrast between the two friends was just the contrast between their present attitudes. The Russian, short, heavily built, indefinite alike of age and sex, with faded skin and dressed without the slightest pretence to taste ; the other, hardly twenty-two yet, tall and elegant, and possessing charms which were daintily set off by a white straw hat trimmed with violets, permitted by the approaching end of her mourning, which shaded a rosy face, eyes of a soft velvety grey, and a mouth a trifle too large and too red, but full of good-humour.

Impressed by the silence of the Sunday and the immobility of the scene about them, neither of them had spoken for a considerable time when suddenly the report of a gun quite close to them, but somewhat deadened by the light autumn mist, caused Casta to look up with a glitter of her spectacles in the sunlight.

" Ah, there 's M. Mauglas killing thrushes for you ! "

Genevieve's umbrella went on digging and tracing idly in the road and Casta continued :

" You are not treating that poor fellow properly. You can see that he adores you, he has talent and he is modest—he must be, for look how long you knew him before it came out that he was the Mauglas of the *Débats* and the *Revue*, the brilliant musical critic, and

the author of those beautiful studies of the Greek and Syrian dances. I don't pretend that he's handsome or even good style, but there's no doubt that he would try and civilise himself for your sake—and then, mind you, he's a man, and that is something nowadays."

"Very well, then, my dear, if you think so why don't you marry him yourself?" said Genevieve, turning to her with a little grimace, half of amusement and half of vexation.

The student raised her poor ugly Tartar face adorned with an impossible Sunday hat of feathers and ribbons, and said gently and without the slightest bitterness:

"I? Yes, that is just what I should like, but what about him—just look at me! No, listen to me, dear."

She drew her towards her with an affectionate gesture and went on, holding her straight in front of her by both hands:

"Now I want to say something to you that has been on my mind for some time past. What are you going to do with this lad who is four years younger than you are, a boy that you would never make a man of, however you tried? Why, if it were even the other boy, Tonin—he is n't sixteen yet, he stammers and is half an invalid, but look what a will he has, what energy! And, as for the other, do you really think that he does any work when you keep him beside you for whole days together with your two noses in the same book? You know, of course, how very important his work is to him, just as it is for others like him, and yet in reality you are taking his attention away from it. I have often thought about this falling off in his powers and of all the reasons that people have found for it. But I don't think one needs to be a sorceress to find the true one. Genevieve, you and you only

are the cause of his indolence. He is a nerveless, lymphatic fellow, and you act on him like opium. You must put an end to this, my dear. If you go on you will ruin him and perhaps yourself. This is not a case of elder sister, you know. There must be either more or less than that between you, and if it is more—well, what can you do? You could not be his wife and, of course, you would not be anything else. If you do not stop now I can see a great deal of trouble ahead for both of you.”

Without taking her hands away, without attempting either to interrupt or to contradict her, Genevieve listened, blushing, until her friend had finished. How many times had she reproached herself almost in the same words! Then she murmured a few halting words of confession, and ended by saying :

“ Shall I prove it to you, my dear Sophia ? ”

She had brought her honest, smiling face quite close to the spectacles as though she wished Casta to look into her eyes and see the purity and honesty of her thoughts, and then she said in a low whisper as if there might be something other than solitude and silence about them :

“ I am going to be married, dear ! ”

“ Ah, that is a good girl ! ” exclaimed the student with an energy that brought her to her feet. “ And who is it ? ”

“ Oh, my old suitor—you know, the man at the Ministry, Simeon. He is coming to lunch this morning to ask again, and this time——”

Casta looked at her horrified.

“ No, no, you can’t mean that ! Simeon ? You have made up your mind to accept *him* ! No, dear, no, you can’t be serious ? ”

The arches of her big eyebrows became more and more contracted with each of these exclamations. What—this colourless anatomy of officialism, methodical enough to be wound up fresh every morning, this hare frightened of its own shadow, without passion, without ideas, a man who had never said anything or thought anything that others had not said and thought before him! Was it possible that Genevieve Izoard could prefer that to the virile talent and self-reliant intelligence of Mauglas?

“ My dear child, have you gone out of your senses? Is n't Mauglas smart enough or young enough for you? ”

“ No, it is n't that. I don't know him well enough—and he frightens me.”

“ It is you who are frightening me. I only know this man through you, but I have always spoken freely before him both about myself and my friends. It was only yesterday that he heard me say that I had hidden in my room——”

“ Oh, do be quiet ! ” interrupted Genevieve, quickly. “ I have no doubt that he is a perfectly good man, but there's a something in his smile, in the turn of his lips, a sort of half-concealed cynicism which troubles me. The idea that he thinks about me and carries any recollection of me about in his mind is absolutely disagreeable to me.”

The Russian murmured : “ Ah, how happy it would have made me ! ” and then she went on with a sigh : “ How badly everything is arranged in this world ! ”

At this moment the sound of footsteps and voices came from a turn in the road. A dusky flush rose into the yellow cheeks of the student under the loud ribbons of her hat. Behind Izoard and Raymond she had seen

the glitter of a gun-barrel and a cock-pheasant's feather stuck in a Tyrolese hunting-hat.

"Just listen to that, little girl," growled the bass voice of Izoard as he came on, with his ever-lengthening and ever-whitening beard shining in the morning sun, "just listen to that and tell me what you think of it. Mauglas, who joined us on the way, wants to make me believe that one generation is just as far from the next as Mars is from the earth, and that when I talk to lads like Raymond about the *Coup d'État* of '52 and the treacherous betrayal of Badingue they have n't a notion of what it 's all about."

"No more than they would understand anyone of my generation who preached to them about the War of 1870 and Revenge."

This strange assertion came from a pair of heavy lips between which was a short English pipe. They were the lips which smiled in the way that Genevieve did not like, and they belonged to a big, shock-headed man of thirty-five to forty in yellow gaiters and a velvet shooting-coat, which looked a good deal too new, who approached the two girls with a sweep of his hat which almost brought the feathers to the road. The student was so proud of her share in this salutation, even though it was half ironical, that a gleam passed across her poor, plain face which made it look almost pretty for the moment, but of course it was lost upon Mauglas and he went on, turning towards Genevieve :

"It is just as though, in the presence of Mdlle. Izoard, I had accused Madame Lafarge of having poisoned her husband with arsenic. Whatever Mdlle. Genevieve's opinion of this notorious case might be I think she could express it without fanaticism, whereas yesterday evening at dinner my dear old mother was

inclined to call all the thunders of Heaven down on my devoted head simply because I expressed a doubt as to the innocence of this sainted woman. There are certain words and dates which are like guide-stones and enable people of the same generation to know where they are, to trace their way back, and that is just what the mention of Madame Lafarge, of old Raspail, and of the sedative drug are for my mother and your father. Do you not agree with me, Mam'selle ? ”

Genevieve murmured : “ Yes,” absently and without turning her head. Already she had no attention for anyone but Raymond, who was walking close beside her telling her about a despairing letter which had arrived that morning from Cherbourg, a letter in which Madame Eudeline, in tears, utterly worn out, had written to her big son telling him that she finally despaired of ever seeing her beloved Paris again and living there as of old amidst her children. She, too, was a sentimentalist, a contemporary of Madame Lafarge, of *Leila*, and of *Indiana*, and she implored him to send her as soon as possible a few flowers from one of the great tulip-trees at Morangis so that she could have them near her—so that the scent of them might before she died recall the memory of the place where she had passed her youth and which she would never see again.

It is true that across this mournful letter Dina had written a couple of lines assuring him that his mother was in perfect health, but the poor lad had had to carry these half-reproaches, these doubts which he read between the lines of the letter, in his heart since the morning, and Tantine felt his student's cloak trembling against her shoulder—for neither Kant, nor Spinoza, nor even Schopenhauer enables our young philosophers

to discard their schoolboy uniform. And this was the day that she had chosen to strike him a crushing blow ! Ah, well, others might come about her trying the effects of literary knowledge or new gaiters upon her, but as they went on together over the plain chatting on this subject she could see nothing, hear nothing, and think of nothing but this : How was she to tell him that she was going to be married ? When was she to tell him ? It would have to be before lunch, of course. Raymond knew both the man and his intentions, and if the blow fell upon him without any preparation it would be infinitely more painful ; only how was she to get five minutes alone with him before Simeon arrived ? Then, all at once, the distant mass of the Chateau of Morangis with its tulip-trees rose to their right and reminded her of Madame Eudeline's request.

“ Supposing we were to go and gather the flowers at once ! ” she whispered to Raymond, and without waiting for him to answer turned away with him, telling the others to go on, as they would be for a few minutes at the chateau.

At twenty-two, Genevieve Izoard, although she had been educated by a student of medicine and a father with very advanced ideas, had remained a true girl, perfectly candid and innocent. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, her father, although he wanted her educated, had no desire to see her one of the fast, slangy students who thought it the proper thing to imitate their male school-fellows and sing snatches of the songs they heard on the boulevards. He had brought up Genevieve apart from all practice of religion and, therefore, he was the more careful of her manners and speech. In that he was a true Southern father and watched over her as jealously as if he

had been the guardian of a seraglio. Once Genevieve had been taken by mistake to see a performance which was a trifle broad, and she had said with perfect innocence to Casta :

“ You see it was really on poor papa's account that I felt so uncomfortable.”

Without sharing the Southern ideas of the old stenographer, this Sophia Castagnozoff whom he had chosen to complete his daughter's education had begun by pleasing him with the rigid propriety of her manners and speech, and her disgust with the medical school. When her fellow-students, either in class or during the botanical excursions, wanted to get rid of her and her humanitarian lectures, or if they just wanted the fun of seeing her blush up to the roots of her yellow hair, they had only to let themselves go after the fashion of their kind and away she would run in an agony of outraged propriety.

In addition to these somewhat peculiar educational influences, her mother's illness had kept Genevieve constantly at home. She had never even been either to a boarding-school or a lecture-room ; she had no romance in her composition and was almost completely destitute of imagination—that is to say, she was wholly absorbed in what she was doing at any one time and put all her attention, all her will into it. This is why this radiant creature had remained absolutely innocent up to twenty-two, and why the first and only instinct of maternity awakened in her had transformed itself almost unconsciously into love.

When she first made this discovery during the last holidays it had filled her with confusion. Merely to be loved by this schoolboy was of itself nothing very much after all, but for her to fall in love with

him, to tremble at his approach, to dream of his handsome face and sunny curls and of the touch of his white delicate hands, to feel angry when he looked at other women or if the mother of his friend Marques wanted to take him away—this was a weakness which she had never expected to trouble her. This child whom she, Tantine, had almost taught to read. No, it would be horrible, if it were not also ridiculous.

Then all at once she set herself to get free, watching over herself as the most jealous governess might have done, avoiding all dangerous contact and tender familiarities. But what a labour that would be, what a waste of useless efforts—it would mean the remaking of her whole existence, the change of every habit she had formed, to say nothing of the anxiety of her father, who would be asking her every minute of the day :

“ Why, child, what on earth is the matter with you ? ”

And there was the poor fellow at her side looking up at her with his big blue eyes filled with tears—a sight that was almost infantile. And then, seeing how hopelessly difficult any other course would be, she there made up her mind to this heroic marriage. This resolution once taken, it became necessary to tell him, to make him understand the circumstances which had driven her to it; and that would be no light task, for, although he had never dared even to hint at such a thing, he was in love with her, and to himself he made no secret of his love.

At sixteen he had begun to write verses to her, fervent lines in the late Latin of the Decadence. He had sung as it were in a boyish treble the beauties

that he saw in her face and form and mind. To him she was the Electra or the Camilla of his class-books, and all the princesses, the heroines and the nymphs and naiads of his classical lore were just so many other varying editions of Tantine. Whether at work or play he could think of nothing but the girl whose portrait, prettily framed *en vignette*, never left him. His friend Marques alone knew that he had it until his mother got a sight of it by a great favour and of course found herself deeply interested in these youthful loves.

Nevertheless, Eudeline, living in a world of visions, surrounded his adored one with a sort of halo of unreality. Somehow it did not seem to him that this fair face with its big limpid eyes was the face of a real girl. He had etherealised it until it had become impossible for him even to attempt to discover whether this exalted passion of his was in any degree returned. How could he stand before this radiant angel of his and say in blunt, human speech, "I love you," without running the terrifying risk of losing the tiny little corner of Paradise in which he had so far lived, the half-happiness with which so many others would have been only too content?

He had consulted Marques on the subject, and he, a precocious youth who was credited with knowing more about women than anyone else at Louis-le-Grand, proposed two alternatives: one was to wait for his opportunity, take her in his arms without further ado and then lip to lip tell her all that it was in his heart to say; the other course was a more insidious one, one of hints and gestures and suggestions conveyed through studies and the readings which they practised together. Fortunately, perhaps, for himself, Raymond, in spite of the confidence that he had in the experience of his

friend, was held back partly by his own innocence but more perhaps by his constitutional timidity, and went on loving in silence, content for the time being to sit at Genevieve's feet close to her, to feel her clothes against his, to see his book upon her lap and to feast his eyes upon the half-suggested outlines of her form.

But this morning, however, this bright, fresh October morning, a sudden change had come over him. His blood seemed to be taking fire from the sunshine in which they were walking. He felt the almost stormful flood of virility sweeping through his swelling veins and his nerves were tingling with the electric thrill of his newly discovered manhood. As he walked on still close beside her he kept on saying in his soul : " Yes, I will do it to-day ; to-day I will tell her that I love her,"—and all the while Genevieve was summoning all her strength to the task of telling him, of making him believe and of making herself believe, that she did not love him and had resolved to marry someone else.





CHAPTER V

A GIRL'S TENDERNES

“THE house does n’t seem to be occupied now,” said Raymond as they reached the great gate and saw over it a wind- and rain-worn notice : “ This House to be Let or Sold.”

“ No, there does n’t seem to be any luck about this poor unfortunate house,” said Genevieve, looking for the bell-pull, which some tramp, angry at finding no one at home to beg from, had doubtless dragged down and taken away. “ When your grandfather died, it was sold to some English people who turned it into a silkworm nursery. It was a failure, and they went away and that notice was put up and has been there ever since.”

Across the court a forester’s cap appeared at one of the tall windows and a voice called out somewhat imperatively :

“ Push the gate open, it is n’t fastened.”

“ That ’s Père Lombard,” said Genevieve as she obeyed. “ He is one of the old Fontainebleau game-keepers. They have put him here to show the place to visitors, and he amuses himself with making walking-sticks and little carved things of the different sorts of wood that grow in the park. You know your grand-

father always had a great fancy for growing rare trees. But what is the matter with you, Raymond? What are you trembling like that for?"

The creak of the gate as it opened, mingling with the harsh cry of a peacock in the grounds and a bell from a neighbouring church-tower sounding the hour of the Mass, had suddenly stirred Raymond to the inmost depths of his being. Like a flash, the memory of other Sundays like this had come back to him—sunny Sunday mornings far away in his past childhood when he used to come back from shooting with his father and had walked hand in hand with him across the fine clean gravel of the court, now strewn with weeds and dead leaves. He could see himself throwing the game-bag down on the kitchen table to the great relief of his back and shoulders, and since then, ah, God! how many things had happened. His head went dizzy and his heart seemed to swell until it filled his whole chest at the sight of this familiar scene in which even the most trifling object brought back some distinct recollection of his lost happiness.

"I am very sorry, Tantine, but I can't help it, I can't bear the sight of the dear old place now. Come, let us get our flowers and go."

She was already sorry for having brought him there and would have liked nothing better, but the two tulip-trees on the terrace, which the storm of the previous night had half stripped of their leaves, had lost all their flowers long ago. Père Lombard, who had come to meet them and had taken off his cap very respectfully when he learnt that he was speaking to a descendant of the old owners of the chateau, fortunately remembered that there was a little shrub down by the lake on which there were still a few flowers.



"THIS HOUSE TO BE LET OR SOLD."

"If M. Eudeline likes to go there he can get through the house. The hall is open, for whenever it is a fine day I like to air the rooms and beat the dust out of the curtains that the last people left there with this—one of my own make!" he said, proudly holding up a hazel-stick topped by a carved whistle.

The four windows of the great reception-room were wide open, and through them Raymond could see, on the other side of the house, the sunlit sheet of water glittering amidst the autumnal glories of the trees like a mirror reflecting the sheen of the green and gold tapestries in the salon. Would he, after all, have the strength to walk through to it—through the empty echoing halls and chambers of this home of his childhood haunted by the ghosts which already seemed to be crowding on him out of the emptiness?

Genevieve saw him draw back and said pitifully :

"No, no, it is too much for you ! Let us come back some other day."

He pulled himself up as though after all he had determined to play the man and said :

"No, we will go on. I wish to. It might be too late another day."

And then he took her by the hand and they went in together.

Ah ! that well-remembered hall, empty and echoing, with its pale-rose stuccoes and a few old straw hats still hanging against the wall ! How many memories seemed to rise up from its floor as he walked through it ! There was the grand staircase with the ball of crystal at the end of the balustrade which Antonin had cracked with a shot from his cross-bow. He could almost see the tall, thin, bowed form of his grandfather creeping slowly up the steps. To the right and left of

him ghosts seemed to be stealing out of the half-open doors beckoning and smiling to him. He saw them put out their hands and heard their clothes rustling and the gentle ticking of clocks long since run down. His impressions were so keen and realistic that Genevieve seemed to catch them by sympathy, and when they had passed through the great building they walked on out into the park close together for some distance without speaking.

In the park itself solitude and neglect made themselves visible, not as they did in the house by emptiness and lifelessness, but rather by that invasion of nature which encroaches upon everything that man abandons. The walks were all grown over with weeds, the lawns patched with parasitic moss, the trees untrimmed and uncared for. The whole of the huge park had been transformed into a forest with green lanes, roads, as the foresters call them, over which every now and then a white-tailed rabbit bounded or a snake glided with its furtive wriggle ; on the moss-grown stone seats there were moving shadows cast by rays of sunlight falling through the trees which seemed to them like friendly spectres moving out of their way as they passed.

“ Well, now, here we are ! there is the island, and I suppose I must tell him now,” said Genevieve to herself. But as she looked at Raymond and saw how deeply agitated he was, the strength of her resolve again died away. He seemed overwhelmed with his memories, utterly forgetful of the present, and for the time being living wholly in the past. If the spectre of his grandfather had just then turned the corner of one of the walks, snuff-box in one hand and a pinch half raised to his nose between the thin thumb and forefinger of the other, it would not have struck him as

being in any way unnatural. He stopped in the middle of the little bridge which crossed the narrow band of deep black water encircling the islet and leaned pensively over the parapet. Genevieve had gone on a little in front of him, but she stopped and came back and said softly :

“ Well, Raymond, what are you doing now ? ”

He turned his pale, handsome face sharply up to her and said :

“ I ? Nothing. I was only looking down into the water.” And then a note of fear stole into his voice as he went on : “ Look, am I not just like my father, Tantine ? ”

It was the very thing that she had dreaded for him for years—the effect of his father's memory and that horrible suicide of his, and she replied as steadily as she could :

“ Your father ? No, certainly not. He was tall and fair like you, but that 's all. I think you 're very much more like your mother.”

“ Yes, as far as character goes, perhaps. I 'm weak like her ; I 've no will of my own ; anything changes me, and that 's a terrible thing, you know, when your life is just one long, heavy task. But it 's even worse than that with me. I have no illusions like poor mother has. There does n't seem to be a bit of romance in me at all.”

“ Oh, no, that 's only the generation that we belong to. There is no romance nowadays,” she replied, with an effort to laugh his black humour away. And then she began to try and distract his attention from his thoughts by pointing out all the varying beauties of the autumnal transformation scene that was going on about them. The trees turning from green to gold

and brown, the dead leaves and withered flowers that had been blown to the ground by the last night's storm, now were looking as though they were trying to revive in the radiance of the morning sun. Finally she dropped on her knees amidst the long grass and turned towards him with two or three flowers in her hand and said :

"Come, Raymond, we are forgetting what we came for. Here are one or two blossoms, at any rate, for your mother's bouquet."

The sudden movement of her supple figure in her close-fitting black dress, the instinctive grace of her gesture, and the bright smile that shone under the brim of her hat banished in an instant the spectres that were crowding about Raymond. He came back to the realities of life and love in the sudden motion with which he threw himself on his knees beside her ; then leaning his head against her shoulder, he looked at the poor little half-dead blossom and murmured :

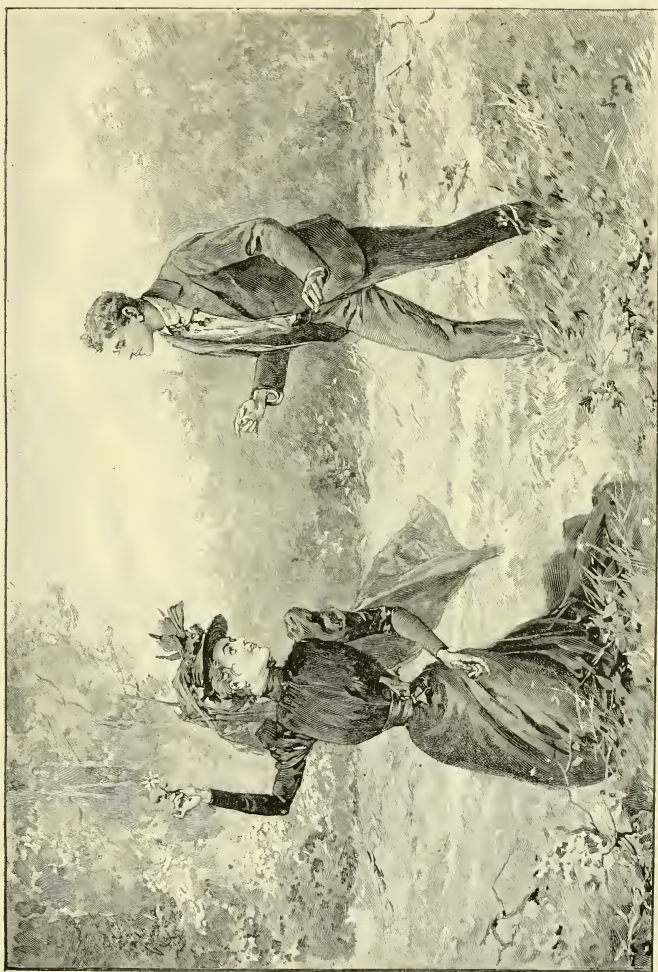
"Poor mother ! I hope that that poor withered little thing is n't a sort of picture of her. Now, for me——"

Then he shuddered and turned his face as though he was going to kiss the white skin of her neck and murmured :

"Ah, Tantine, life terrifies me ! If I had not you to cheer me up, to give me courage, what would become of me ? You will never leave me, Tantine, will you ?"

Then she thought with a sudden sinking of her heart, "It has come at last ; if I don't tell him now, when shall I ever dare to do it ?" And she went on aloud, still on her knees beside him without moving or turning her head :

"No, dear, I won't, whatever happens, and when I am married, as I suppose I shall be soon, I will always



“ HERE ARE ONE OR TWO BLOSSOMS, AT ANY RATE, FOR YOUR MOTHER'S BOUQUET.”

manage that I shall still be your sister and your friend."

She had hardly finished when she felt him slip away from her shoulder, and turning round saw him rolling in the grass with closed eyes, white lips, and hard, clenched hands.

"Raymond, Raymond, dear, what is the matter?"

It was her turn to be frightened now and she dropped beside him and took up his head and pressed it against her breast, stroking his white cheeks with her hand.

"Nothing, nothing," he muttered, opening his eyes and looking up into hers. "Nothing. It was only dizziness, a madness, I felt the whole world fall away from under me and the sky fall down and crush me because I fancied I heard something which you could n't have said. No, you could n't have said it, could you, Tantine—you, marry! Oh, my God! No, you could n't!"

She could no more lie in words than she could practise any other deception, and so she just hung her head in silence and then he burst into sobs of lamentations and reproaches. Tantine marry! And whom? Simeon—and without even caring for him? No, she could never have wanted to do that, she never would do it, it was impossible, a sacrilege! Then he buried his face in her lap and wept, wetting her hands with his tears as she tried to soothe him with little petting gestures.

"But, dear Raymond, yes, I must. I can't help it, and my father wants me to. I am not a schoolgirl any longer, you know, and then, besides, you'll marry some day yourself, and that won't prevent you from keeping friends with me."

He shook his head violently and then turning his face half upward to hers replied:

“ I ? How can I ever marry ? As soon as I have a profession, if I ever have one, I already have a whole family to keep. I have to take my father’s place, and besides, how can there ever be any other woman in the world for me except you, Genevieve ? Do you think I could ever marry anyone else ? No, you know how I love you, and now you have just told me that you don’t love me. No, you don’t love me as I want to be loved—as a sweetheart would love me. You don’t know what that sort of love is. You take me for a child just because I wear a schoolboy’s cap and tunic, but that ’s nothing. I ’m eighteen, and at Louis-le-Grand I often hear fellows younger than I am talking about their mistresses. I ’ve never wanted a mistress because I ’ve always been thinking of you, and you have saved me from wanting such a parody of love as that. But if you are going to forsake me what is to happen to me ! No, no, you could n’t be so wicked, Tantine.”

Then he stopped and began to cover the pretty white hand which she abandoned to him with kisses and tears. She was silent, too, torn by the cruel debate that was going on in her soul. She knew that the place and the hour were solemn, for they marked a crisis in her existence, and yet, in order to conquer, it would be necessary for her, truthful and all as she was, to deceive him to some extent, in short to lie to him, to speak empty words which the voice of expediency was already suggesting to her but which could never have any real, living meaning. Then all of a sudden he sprang to his feet and said in a tone which had suddenly become firm and manly in the strength of his resolution :

“ Very well, then, there is an easy way out of it for

me if you do marry. My father has shown me how to get rid of life and its burdens and uglinesses, but I shall take good care not to wait till I 'm as old as he was."

" Raymond, Raymond, for God's sake, stop ! "

But he went on grimly and quietly as though assured of the weight and force of his argument :

" Yes, I thought about it just now on the bridge. I saw my father right down in the water looking just as he did when they took him out of the canal. He beckoned to me to go to him and seemed trying to tell me that I should be much better off, much better, and so I shall go and see."

He said it two or three times over : " I shall go and see," with a mirthless smile and a soft, threatening note in his voice which filled her with terror. The truth was that he had seen in his own reflection in the water a sort of distant resemblance to his unhappy father ; but the only thought in his soul was : " How did he find courage to kill himself? I could n't do it for anything. Whatever happened to me I should have to live—yes, life before all things ! " And this was the brown study which had so terrified the poor girl, too sincere herself to doubt the threats which chimed in so with her own fears : " Ah ! these grim laws of heredity with which science is, alas ! fast darkening a life which is already too black ! He is nervously morbid, just as his father was. Let us hope that he will not finish like him ! "

How many times had she heard with fear and disgust her friend Casta crushing all her own hopes for him under this pitiless diagnosis! How could it be if on the morning after her marriage he was brought to her with his lips blue and his eyes closed forever ; and all that horror for this Simeon whom she had never loved

and never could love. Suddenly, while he was still murmuring his cruel and lying threat, "I will go! I will go!" she put her hand over his mouth and said:

"Stop, stop, you have tortured me enough. There, there, I won't marry this time. I don't know what my father will say, or how he will get out of it with Simeon, but let them arrange that between them. What does it matter, after all, if I never marry, if I am always Tantine and nothing else? Now look up and tell me that you are content."

She was standing quite close to him, her whole being instinct with a sort of maternal tenderness. He felt that she was his, that now she was his dupe forever, and in a transport of joy and triumph he caught her in his arms and crushed her to him in a passionate embrace.

"Really! Really! You won't marry him, you will never marry him! Oh, Genevieve, what a darling you are, and how I love you! Now tell me that you love me too."

"Raymond!"

Then their lips met and clung together. It was their first kiss.

And after that came a sweet silence mingled with delicious pain. They had thrown themselves face to face down on the grass and there they half sat, half leaned, looking in silence into each other's eyes while the whole world changed about them. He was no longer her boy, she was no longer Tantine. For the moment they were alone in the world, the whole sunlit earth, the trees, the sky, the chasing clouds existed only for them. They had tasted of the Tree, the scent of the Rose of Eden was in their nostrils.

Then suddenly the silence was rudely broken and

the sweet enchantment dispelled by a voice calling out their names.

"There is Casta ! She is looking for us. My father will be wondering what is become of us," said Genevieve in a low tone. And they both jumped up blushing.

But Genevieve was wrong about her father, for, so far from disquieting himself in the slightest about their absence, Pierre Izoard was taking advantage of it to discuss with her suitor the marriage portion and other little matters which are always somewhat difficult to debate in the presence of a young girl on the eve of marriage.





CHAPTER VI

A PRUDENT SUITOR

IZOARD was standing on the steps of the little slate-roofed bungalow watching for the omnibus from Antony which on such a day as this would probably be loaded up with Parisian holiday-makers just as it might be on any summer Sunday. As he saw it coming he pulled his broad-brimmed planter's hat, with its two-year-old band of crape still round it, down over his right ear and walked with conscious dignity down the three broad wooden steps and into the road to meet his prospective son-in-law.

The omnibus stopped at the Mauglases' door. They had a bungalow next to his, only a more modern one. Old Mauglas was a peasant, a true son of the soil, bent and brown as though he had taken his colour from the earth that he had tilled, and he and his son took from the conductor with ostentatious care a series of baskets and boxes branded with the names of the most fashionable purveyors in Paris and passed them into the door, whence they vanished into the interior between the yellow, bony hands of Madame Mauglas and so descended into the kitchen.

The old stenographer, standing, hands in pockets and



‘WHAT A LOT OF GLUTTONS THEY ARE!’

feet wide apart, in the middle of the road, looked on this proceeding a trifle enviously and growled to himself: "What a lot of gluttons they are! It's like this every Sunday. Young Mauglas is always bringing some of his chums down to a family blow-out like this. Yes, there they are, a regular troop of them."

As he said this three or four young men, well dressed and spectacled, but mostly with pale, tired faces, jumped down from the vehicle and went into the house shaking hands and uttering their How-do-you-do's in voices so loud and lively and so unlike their general appearance that they seemed to be already half intoxicated with the autumn sunlight and the fresh, crisp country air. The last passenger who got down was dressed far more carefully in very obvious Sunday garb, with a very straight, shiny hat and neatly fitting pearl-grey gloves. He left them with a salute which was at once dignified and reserved. It was M. Simeon, the anxiously awaited, himself.

This young man was a nephew of a retired colonel and Questor of the Chamber, and he prided himself very considerably on his exalted connections. He dressed exceedingly well, cultivated a very pretty moustache and imperial, possessed a varied assortment of cravats and walking-sticks, and was slightly afflicted, especially in the presence of ladies, with a somewhat silly-looking quivering of the eyelids.

"Well, Simeon, I'm sorry to have to give you a little temporary disappointment," said Izoard, as they shook hands. "I thought she would be here to meet you; but, however, that will only mean a little healthy exercise of patience. She won't be long, and meanwhile we can have a little talk."

He pushed open the vine-encircled garden gate and

took Simeon into his portion of a big orchard which he shared with the Mauglases, separated from them by a low wall, covered with fruit-trees. There were no other neighbours, and the whole orchard was walled in by fruit-trees and evergreens which had been planted so that Madame Izoard could always see a little bit of greenery even in winter. Through the middle of the garden ran a straight, well-kept gravel path expanding to a circle in the middle, and in this circle stood a rustic summer-house with an outside seat running round under the overhanging eaves. Here the two men sat down to have their talk before Genevieve's arrival. There was no one to interrupt them, and they could hear nothing but sounds of laughter coming from the next garden and the chiming of the church clock at Morangis in the distance.

When they were seated Izoard coughed gently and began :

"I told you some time ago, my dear Simeon, that my daughter possessed a little fortune of fifty thousand francs left to her by her grandmother in Nice. Now I want to explain to you how it is that her marriage portion will not be quite as large as I hoped it would be."

He coughed again two or three times so as to give his prospective son-in-law an opportunity of saying, "Well, my dear sir, what is that to me?" or, "My dear father-in-law, I don't want you to think that I am marrying your daughter for just what she brings me." But Simeon maintained a stony silence and so he had to go on.

"When my wife fell ill and we took this house and bit of garden, the place caught her fancy to such an extent that nothing would do but that I should buy it.

She seemed to have a rooted idea that if I did n't all her comfort in life would end with the expiration of the lease, and so I had to buy it. Unfortunately just then I had only fifteen thousand francs at my disposal, and the owner wanted twenty-five thousand. Genevieve, like a good girl, immediately made up the difference, which, after all, was not a thing that one could be at all surprised at."

Monsieur Simeon, however, appeared to be very much surprised indeed, but did n't say anything ; so Izoard went on again.

"Some little time after that, Victor Eudeline, the father of the two boys you have often met here, wanted some money for building purposes, and my little girl at once asked me : ' How much does he want ? ' Ten thousand francs ? Very well, take them.' Her mother and myself made all reasonable objections and we told her : ' You had better take care. In times like these it 's all very well for a girl to be pretty, but she won't get married unless she takes her husband something.' And then the child laughed and said, ' Oh, nonsense, Simeon loves me; he will marry me all the same.' Ah ! she knew you very well, my dear fellow, but all the same, that has made a difference of twenty thousand francs in her fortune. None of the Eudelines had an idea that this money came from her. She thought that the children might not love her quite so well, or, perhaps I should say, might feel a little bit afraid of her, if they knew that she had played benefactress in this way to the family. Only an idea, of course, but still a very nice, pleasant sort of idea, don't you think, my friend ? "

Then there fell upon the garden a great silence pierced only by the twitterings of the birds and the

chimings of the distant clock. Ah, what a lovely, deep blue sky it was ! Was there ever a brighter morning for a happy betrothal ?

" Then, if my calculations are correct, Mdlle. Genevieve's portion will not be more than thirty thousand francs."

M. Simeon said this in a queer, whistling sort of voice. Then, without giving Izoard any time to reply, he rose suddenly from the seat and stood in front of his prospective father-in-law, with his hand behind his back and his yellow cane tapping his legs, and said :

" Really, that is most unfortunate, I can assure you."

He began to walk up and down in front of the seat with little mincing strides and explained how exceedingly embarrassing this unexpected news was to him. It was absolutely necessary for him to have fifty thousand francs. Thirty thousand were no good to him. He had just gone into a very big affair on the strength of his expectation. He had made one of a syndicate of four which was about to build extensive kennels for sporting dogs which they were going to breed, and the business would be a very profitable one. The capital was divided into four parts of fifty thousand francs each. They were only waiting for his share. As a matter of fact, they had been waiting some considerable time for it.

As M. Simeon said this he looked at the old stenographer with a little flutter of his eyelids.

" You will understand, my dear M. Izoard, that I have by no means wanted for opportunities. My uncle has two or three times offered to arrange marriages which would have brought me very considerable por-

tions, but, in spite of her much more modest fortune, Mdlle. Genevieve stood first in my affections. But notwithstanding that, you will of course understand that I must keep the engagements which I have entered into, and I cannot allow others to profit by an idea which was entirely mine, as this was. Another thing, I should have been very glad to see your daughter profit by it as well."

"My dear fellow, please don't mention it," said Izoard, who was beginning to wonder what his son-in-law *in posse* was driving at. "My little girl is something like her father, she does n't know the value of money, and she does n't very much want to. Marry her, love her, and love your children when you get them, and you won't find that I shall ask anything else from you, and I 'm quite sure she won't."

M. Simeon suddenly stopped in his little walk and planted himself before Izoard with his pearl-grey gloved hands clasped on the knob of his cane, and so standing he began to explain, with a considerable amount of affectation, that one of his great weaknesses was the fear of running short, and he finally wound up with the point-blank statement that it was absolutely impossible for him to begin housekeeping on less than fifty thousand francs.

The old man paled as he looked up and said :

"But my daughter has not got fifty thousand, sir."

M. Simeon drew himself up and struck his most dignified attitude.

"Then, my dear M. Izoard, in spite of my own very keen disappointment I find myself compelled——"

He took off his hat and bowed his little round head, crossed in the middle, just like Izoard's garden, with a straight narrow pathway most admirably kept, and

then, turning on his heel, he walked with a quick step towards the garden gate. There was a bell on it and it tinkled as he opened it to go into the highway.

"But, Simeon, you've forgotten the lunch!" cried the old man in despair.

There were very few restaurants in Morangis. He would have to go on to Antony and there would probably be a considerable time to wait for the train. M. Simeon had not thought of that, and he hesitated with his hand on the gate. But then came the prospect of facing Mdle. Genevieve. He made a little heroic gesture and vanished as quickly as though one of his prospective sporting dogs had dragged him through the gateway.

Utterly crushed by the unexpected brutality of M. Simeon, the old stenographer sat motionless under the summer-house muttering over and over again in his white beard :

"Well, there's a thing to call a man, for you!"

And he was still muttering this when Genevieve and Raymond came in, followed by Sophie Castagnozoff. All three of them looked a little bit peculiar. Tantine, trembling and still blushing a little, was asking herself what possible excuse she could give to her father and Simeon for a final refusal. Raymond, still thrilling with his first kiss and still seeming to feel the pressure of her supple form against his, kept on looking at her with an air of pride and triumph which made him look ever so much handsomer and more manly.

"I wonder what on earth is the matter with them," the Russian student was asking herself. And all the way home she kept up a dropping fire of questions.

"You've told him?"

"Of course I have."

"It 's curious that he does n't look a bit distressed about it."

The only answer to this was a shrug of the shoulders which seemed to say mutely : "What is the use of asking me a thing like that?" And Genevieve walked on, silent and completely preoccupied, trying to find words in which to convey her unalterable resolve to her unfortunate suitor.

"Simeon has gone," growled Izoard's bass voice as his daughter came within ear-shot.

"What, gone ! M. Simeon ?"

And then there were looks and cross-looks, and an almost heavenly light seemed to break over Mdlle. Genevieve's rosy countenance.

"Yes, gone, and never to come back, I hope," shouted the old stenographer, with a loud-sounding but fairly harmless malediction which anything but expressed the volume of his indignation.

"Just think, my little girl," he shouted, again flinging out his arms with force enough to dislocate his shoulders, "just think why Simeon won't have you—for there is no use talking about it, it is he who won't have you now. And why not ? Because your portion is twenty thousand francs short of what he wants. There 's a nice sort of jackanapes for you !"

The next instant Genevieve's arms were round his neck.

"Ah, poor Papa ! Well, never mind ! *We* shall very soon console ourselves, I think."

And her eyes glistened and laughed through the mock veil of melancholy with which she tried so hard to mask her delight.

"I don't think there 'll be very much difficulty in replacing him," said the Russian, whose spectacles kept

on roving with a considerable amount of disquiet from Raymond to Genevieve and back again. "We need n't look very far while M. Mauglas——"

The old stenographer started violently. Intensely jealous of his daughter, but blind like all jealous people, he had never even noticed his neighbour's attention to her.

"Young Mauglas!" he exclaimed with one of his low notes.

And as though to answer him there came from the other garden the tum-tumming of a guitar and a clear baritone voice singing :

"À table, à table, à table
Mangeons ce jambonneau.'

A chorus of tuneless voices, accompanied by the thumping of a frying-pan, made an attempt to continue in unison :

"Qui serait detestable
S'il n'était mangé chaud."

Genevieve slipped her arm through her father's and said :

"There, you see the state of mind that my other lover is in just now. Let us follow his example and go and have some lunch."





CHAPTER VII

THE YOUNGER BROTHER

THE dining-room of the old bungalow more than a century ago had been half country-house, half hunting-lodge ; the walls had echoed and the windows had rattled to the drinking-songs and heavy laughter of tax-farmers, army contractors, and peers and senators of the Restoration and the Empire. In this room, which every Sunday afternoon was transformed into a study for Tantine and her pupil, Raymond had passed many a happy hour, but never one like this. The lovely view which he could see from his place as he sat at table, familiar as it was, yet seemed to him like some *terra incognita* newly discovered and now seen for the first time through the golden glamour of love and passion. Sitting opposite to Genevieve, he felt that every time their eyes met he must cry out loud : “ Come away ; you are mine now ! I want to take you where we can be alone together. What has this world to do with us ? ” His whole being was filled and permeated by a flood of new strength and joy, with the knowledge that she had promised herself to him forever, with the everlasting fragrance of that first kiss of love. Life had no more terrors for him now. Antonin, too, had arrived quite unexpectedly, and the good news

that he brought completed the general gaiety of the table. His employer was taking him to England to manage a dynamo installation in some Thames-side works. When he got there he would have his own rooms and would be treated quite as a full-fledged engineer, and he hardly seventeen yet. That would be good news for the mother in Cherbourg. The poor lad seemed fairly shivering with joy at his good fortune and his nervousness increased his stuttering to quite a painful extent, and all the more so as he kept on trying to use fine complicated phrases which naturally tripped him up worse than ever. "Shall you keep on your rooms in the Place des Vosges?" asked Casta, who had got her favourite to come and sit next to her so that she could give him his coffee.

"Oh yes, of course, Mam'selle; you see they cost very little after all, and I shall often be coming to Paris you—you know, and so you see it will still be at your disposal—eh, is not that so?"

The Russian accepted gladly. It happened that just then she was hiding one of her countrymen, the famous Revolutionary, Lupniak, whose presence in Paris had been the cause of bringing over the Prefect of Police from St. Petersburg with some of his most skilful allies. Nothing could be better than this little refuge in the Place des Vosges, all ready and furnished, and so far away from the Pantheon and the Quartier Saint-Marcell, where nearly all the refugees were.

"And when do you start for London, Tonin?"

"We ought to go to-morrow, but my certificates are not quite ready yet, and they are so—so particular about the—the paper and things at Calais."

"Oh yes, I know. Poor Lupniak's business taught

me all about that—you know that is why I want your room if you are going to-morrow. But we need n't trouble the others by talking about that here. Bring your cup and let us go and finish our coffee in the garden."

So they went and found a seat at the bottom under the shadow of the hedge.

Although he was a full year younger than his brother, Antonin already looked older. Short and rather thick-set, with the hard hands of a worker in metal, there was something in his walk and bearing, although pleasant and not undignified, which might arouse some suspicion of social inferiority, which was emphasised by his short, dark reddish hair and almost total lack of eyelashes, and marks in his skin caused by tiny burns. He submitted to this suggestion of inferiority, which was, of course, a matter of occupation and not in any sense of birth, without either impatience or complaint, and nothing could be more touching than his admiration for his big brother to whom the injustice of superior age had given all the priceless advantages of education. Raymond, on his part, loved his younger brother tenderly, but with a certain sense of patronage, and all the people in the house, taking their cue from him, seemed to condescend a little when they spoke to him. He was, in short, looked upon as a sort of simple, good-hearted fellow whose name could hardly be mentioned without a smile.

"I don't like to see Tonin mixing himself up with those political affairs," he said to Izoard, nodding his head towards the seat on which his brother and Casta were sitting.

"Oh, I don't think there is any fear of that," replied Izoard. "Antonin has too much sense to get himself

involved with them, and, besides, he is going away for some time."

"Yes, I dare say that's so. After all, perhaps, I'm more afraid of Casta."

Then the old man fell into one of his spoken reveries standing staring out of the open window.

"These people are not Revolutionaries, they're only wild beasts, especially these Russians that she goes with. Now I have known some great Revolutionaries. Indeed, when I was young I could boast of being one myself, but then we had some human feelings; we were n't wolves. Now this Lupniak with his wild beast's head, a man who boasted here, when she brought him one evening, of having burnt a general's house in Little Russia and having roasted him and his wife and three children alive—bah, he is a savage! And when I think of our dear, gentle Casta, who could n't look on while an insect was being killed, I wonder what sympathy there can be between her and such cannibals as these, and half of them are in the pay of their own police—spies or tempters of others; but the poor girl won't believe me, and she never will until she gets into an adventure something like what happened to me in '48 at the Barbes Club—but I think I've told you that story often enough before, have n't I, little girl?"

Genevieve smiled gently and said:

"Well, yes, Papa, I think you have."

"Very well, then, I'll keep it for your friend," replied Izoard, not in the least disconcerted. "It'll do him more good than you."

She got up to follow him into the garden, a little frightened of another *tête-à-tête* with Raymond, but suddenly Mauglas's head, with his big English pipe

and broad hat, appeared behind the garden wall. No. It was no use ; the man frightened her. Instinctively she felt whenever he came about the house that he was coming after her, and the very sound of his footstep was almost torture to her. The sweet suffering that Raymond could cause her was very different, and so she decided to stop with him. Then, just as they had done every other Sunday, Tantine and her pupil ensconced themselves near the window for their afternoon's work.

As Izoard went down the walk Mauglas hailed him and, pointing with his pipe towards where Casta and Tonin were sitting, began an absurd story about having caught them in *flagrante delicto* exchanging hundreds of kisses, and Casta jumped up and came to meet him protesting with brick-red cheeks.

"Never mind him, Casta, don't you see he is only making fun of you?" he laughed. "Besides, why should n't girls run after young men? Is there any more harm in that than in men running after nothing but the dollars as they do now? Ah, Mauglas, my friend, I can quite believe now what you said to me about the gulf that there is between one generation and another, after the proof that I had this morning."

"Simeon, eh?" said the journalist with a not over-pleasant laugh. Then, noticing the astonishment of Izoard at seeing him so well informed, he went on: "Surely, you were talking loud enough about it; one did n't need to be eavesdropping to hear you. Besides, everyone knows about it by this time. I have just been seeing my friends off by the omnibus, and Simeon was boasting before everybody about what he had done."

"I 'm not surprised at it," said Izoard, a little bitterly. "I 've learnt to-day that between men of my

age and men of thirty to forty-five there is not only a gap—there is a gulf, especially when it comes to a matter of sentiment.”

Mauglas entirely agreed with him and launched out into a discourse on the characteristics of generations—how some smoked and others did n't, and some could only sing to Wagner's tunes, and finally he compared the men of the generation to the crew and passengers of a steamboat, different in rank, tastes, and objects, but all necessarily moving in one direction, and ended by taking his pipe out of the corner of his mouth and began roaring a snatch of a song, an old song of Masini's, and at the second line nodded and disappeared behind the hawthorns.

“A queer sort of fellow,” laughed Izoard, as he heard him go, still singing, into the house.

And Antonin, who had been curled up like a hedgehog on the seat, unrolled himself with the remark that as far as he could see Mauglas was just a bit too much of a neighbour.

“And that is exactly what I was going to say,” said Sophie, as they walked back towards the house.

That evening after their Morangis friends had left them, as usual, at the Tree of Liberty, the two boys indulged in the now precious luxury of a confidential chat as they walked on arm in arm to the station along by-paths which they had known since they were children. The night was a little damp, and high above the mist which was falling over the fields they could see far away in front of them the vast lurid halo which crowned the skies above Paris. It seemed to Tonin to be one of the proudest and happiest times of his life, walking along there arm in arm with his big brother, listening to all his confidences, especially the confession

of his love for Genevieve and all the vows of constancy that they had exchanged.

“ Ah, yes, we love each other deeply, and yet we shall never be united ! ” exclaimed Raymond, always theatrical and declamatory, even when his sentiments were most genuine.

“ But why not ? What on earth is there to prevent it ? ”

Tonin’s voice trembled as he asked this, and the tremor in it was due as much to pleasure as to sadness ; for deep down in his soul, down in those depths into which even the soul itself dare scarcely look, there shone the image of Tantine, and though he of course looked upon his brother as more worthy of this great joy, still there might have been times when he himself——

“ But why should n’t you marry as soon as you can ? ”

“ You must know that I shall never be able to do that. I must be the support of the family, everything depends on me. It is a hard, a bitter sacrifice, but I have been preparing for it now for a long time.”

He spoke with absolute sincerity. So utterly was he convinced of the truth of what he said that the tears began to roll down his cheeks at the thought of all that his relations would cost him. But Antonin did not understand him in this way. What was the use of him doing all that he did, why should he go and exile himself amidst the fogs of London, if it was not in some way to lighten the task of his elder brother ? In the falling shadows of the night he took his hand and pressed it and held it.

“ There are two of us to make that sacrifice, Raymond,” he said softly. “ Listen and I will tell you part of what I hope to do.”

The night darkened into silence about them, only far away an owl hooted dismally ; and then hesitating, stammering, and waiting for the words that were so slow in coming, Tonin told his plans. First, pay their father's debts and the five thousand francs which remained due to Izoard's friend. Since he had been with Esprit-Cornat he had already saved half of this sum, although the brave little fellow never hinted at the privations which this had cost him. But at the end of a year—the year that he was going to spend in England—he believed that he would be able to clear off half the whole debt. Then he would bring his mother and Dina from Cherbourg. In fact he was already dreaming of their taking charge of a neat little shop where they would sell some of his own electrical inventions which he hoped to patent. Thank God, he was not wanting in ideas if he was in words !

He had got this far, when Raymond suddenly stopped and pulled his arm away. A little distance off, the lantern of an inn glimmered through the autumn mist, and farther off still a few lights shone down the road from the first houses of Antony.

“ And I—what about me in all this ? Am I not to be considered ? ” he asked bitterly.

For the first time he felt stricken with a pain that was just then almost imperceptible, but which as the years went on he was destined to feel more and more keenly. Tonin replied without understanding him :

“ What do you mean ? What about you ? ”

“ Yes, what about me when I have finished my studies and left the Lycée ? It is I who will have to provide for the house for mamma and Dina.”

“ But you can't, Raymond, with your law, or your medicine, or whatever it is, to study. What will be

the good of all your work at school if you don't go in for a profession ? ”

The elder brother in his school uniform took the younger by the shoulders and drew him towards him with quite a paternal gesture.

“ My dear boy, what of that ? Just as if I had not sacrificed that with all the rest.”

“ Oh, but no, no, that will never do ! ” cried Tonin passionately. “ No, I shall provide for the house so that you sha'n't have any trouble of that sort on your hands, so that—that—well, you know——”

“ Don't go on, Tonin, you have hurt me enough already ! ” Raymond interrupted haughtily. And Tonin stammered :

“ No, no, forgive me, Raymond, I did n't mean to.” Then he went on in a lower tone and almost weeping : “ But how are you going to manage, Raymond ? What are you going to do ? ”

They had just reached the station, and with a motion of his hand which seemed to take in the whole place, houses, trees, and lights, and everything, Raymond replied :

“ Never mind, that is my business.”

Seeing him so assured, Tonin jumped to the conclusion that M. Marc Javel had got a nice comfortable berth all ready for him as soon as he left the Lycée. The whole family still believed as firmly as they did the first day in the powerful protection of the Minister, and Tonin himself more firmly than any of them, because in such matters he was the simplest of them all.

“ Very well,” he said, “ we can talk about that in the train.”

But as soon as he was seated beside his brother someone jumped in and threw himself in the seat just oppo-

site to them, the only vacant one in the badly lit compartment. The whole train was crowded with busy, perspiring, loud-talking holiday-makers. It was in fact a Sunday-night suburban train. As it drew out of the station a little pale light came in through the windows and helped out the feeble lamp.

“ Ah, good-evening, boys,” growled a familiar voice, and Raymond replied :

“ Good-evening, M. Mauglas.”





CHAPTER VIII

THE JOURNALIST

BEFORE his brother, Raymond tried to stand on his dignity, but in his heart he was a bit afraid of the journalist because of his chaff and cynicism, and he always felt inclined to blush for his eighteen years and his schoolboy uniform, more especially when Tantine was there too. But to-night Mauglas seemed too absent to have much wickedness in him. He leaned out of the window and looked eagerly into the gathering mists of nothing. Then, all of a sudden, he said without looking round :

“ Do you boys remember the war ? Where were you during the Siege ? But perhaps you were n’t born then.”

“ Oh yes, I ’m quite sure that I was born then,” said Raymond, drawing himself up. “ I remember all about it, how the factory was shut up—or at least turned into a hospital,—and the battalion of Civil Guards. My father was Captain, and M. Alexis, the cashier, Sergeant-Major. I remember them coming up the street beating the charge and singing one of the war-songs, and how Tantine used to throw down a ball and shout, ‘ Look out for the bomb ! ’ so as to teach us to throw ourselves flat on the ground when they did

come, and how poor mother got into despair over her cooking with horse-steaks and the dirty bread, and a pie that she tried to make out of some elephant meat and some other things that she got from the Zoölogical Gardens. Don't you remember, Tonin, how ill it made you ? ”

Tonin shivered a little without replying, and Mauglas muttered into his pipe :

“ The little one does n't seem to have any very pleasant recollections of the Siege.”

His teeth were clenched and there was a nervous motion in his lower jaw which showed what an effort it was to get his words out as Tonin replied :

“ War is horrible and hideous. I—I—well, you know how I hate war ! ”

Then the big man shrugged his shoulders and said :

“ Poor little chap, I 'm afraid you don't know what is good.”

Then in a voice that was, for him, almost an undertone he began to talk about the places whose shapes were flitting past them like phantoms in the night, and told them how here there were redoubts, there barracks, there barricades and outposts.

“ L'Hay, Chevilly, l'Aqueduc d'Aroueil, Les Hautes-Bruyères, ah ! what roaring nights I used to spend out there with the guns banging and flashing in every direction and German shells coming screaming overhead every minute or two ! And so you don't like war, young fellow ? That 's just one of the ideas of your age, but I think you get them from Casta, that little petticoated Russian sawbones, although of course I worship her as everybody else does—and her friend Tolstoi, an old fool who spits on war as he does on love, just because he has n't any teeth to bite with or to keep

his lips in kissing shape. But why should he stop others fighting or loving? Why should he tell lies about eternal passions?"

He lowered his voice a little more seeing that the people in the carriage were beginning to pay attention to him, and so what he said got more easily to the young ears that were forced to listen to him:

"Yes, boys, you may not think it, but I can tell you that after all, those times I spent in the bivouacs were the happiest in my life. There we were for four winter months, a real bitter winter which they seemed to have brought from Pomerania in their knapsacks. The troop that I belonged to never once went into the city. There was never a day—hardly an hour—but what someone was shot down or blown to pieces with a shell, and then the man-hunting about the suburbs, the fights in the night—no, no, my dear Raymond," he went on, addressing the elder as he felt that Tonin was not paying much attention to him, "the philosophers can say what they like, but there is nothing to make life big and great and worth living—I mean this dull, dry-as-dust life that we live—like danger. This little bit of a suburb here looked to me as big as the world when I thought I was going to leave my bones here. And I did n't leave them. What luck! Ah! fancy dying at twenty with a bullet through your skull, instead of dragging out a miserable drab existence of hopeless mediocrity."

Something seemed to crack at the bottom of his throat as he said this, and he turned his head to the window and did n't move again till the train got to Paris.

"Shall I see you back to the shop?" said Tonin, as they went down the staircase of the station among the crowd.

Mauglas, who was walking near them, started and said :

“ What ’s that ? The shop ? ”

Raymond laughed.

“ The shop is the name they give to Louis-le-Grand, where there is a regulation that every pupil who has been out shall be escorted to the door by a friend or relation.”

“ But there ’s no use in Antonin going out of his way like that ? ” said Mauglas, quickly. “ He lives in the Place des Vosges, and I ’m staying in the Luxembourg, which is quite close to the Lycée, and so, unless you would find my company bore you—— ”

Tonin tried to protest, but he was so slow in getting his words out that Raymond, proud of showing himself to the ushers of Louis-le-Grand arm-in-arm with a celebrity, had accepted Mauglas’s offer, embraced his brother, and poured forth a thousand good wishes for his journey before he had stammered his way through a sentence.

While the poor lad was walking to the dark and desert part of Paris where his little lodging was, he soliloquised aloud with that fluency which people who stammer merely from nervousness are so frequently capable of when they are alone, and as he passed the half-finished houses, the walls covered with posters, policemen flitting here and there like shadows, and the dark figures of men and women lying drunk upon the door-steps and the seats by the roadside, all the splendid projects that he associated with this visit of his to London, all his dreams of fortune and the inventions that were going to make it, took shape and became almost realities for the time being.

Meanwhile Raymond and his companion walked

down the "Boul' Mich'," gay and glittering as it might have been on a summer Sunday night, just such a one in short as this late October evening, and as they were passing one of the great cafés which encumber half the pavement he heard the name of Mauglas murmured from table to table, and he began to swagger a little, while the celebrity on whose arm he walked smiled that smile which Genevieve disliked so much. It amused him to see this youthful vanity which led such as he so surely to the bait.

"You, my dear Raymond," he said suddenly, as if he were beginning aloud where he had just left off in his mind, "you see things more clearly than the other people who are about you. Sorrow has ripened you and polished you and reflection and study have sharpened your intelligence, and that is why I would rather speak to you—I mean, say what I am going to say to you—rather than to M. Izoard or your brother——"

"I am sure I am very grateful to you, M. Mauglas."

"Don't mention it; it's nothing. The thing is, that Sophia interests me. I see her getting into bad surroundings, making friends with a lot of fanatics and maniacs. When she is not at Morangis with our good friends there she just lives among madmen, and I'm afraid that some day she'll be getting mixed up with some very disagreeable business. For instance, this fellow that she is hiding just now——"

"You mean Lupniak, of course?"

"Just so, Lupniak. Now I ask you if that is a sensible thing for any girl to do, to give up her room to Lupniak, to a proved and known assassin wanted by half the police of Europe, a man who could n't find a refuge anywhere except in London. But you are quite sure that it is Lupniak?"

Yes, he was quite sure. M. Izoard had only that day spoken of him with horror in the presence of himself and Genevieve.

Mauglas uttered a sigh, and then asked if she had not given shelter to others. Had Raymond never heard of a man named Papoff?

"The one who had set up a secret printing-press at her place in the Rue du Pantheon?"

"That's the man. What a memory you must have, Raymond!"

They went on a few more steps in silence, half crossed the road, and then Mauglas stopped suddenly in the middle of the street and said:

"Let us work together, and we can save her in spite of herself. I have a perfect horror of politics, but the journal that I am on, which was Gambetta's once, has brought me into connection with the authorities and I am pretty good friends with the Minister of the Interior and the Prefect of Police and people like that, and so, as far as France is concerned, our friend will be pretty safe. But the St. Petersburg Prefect of Police is here armed with full powers, and you know we should n't like to see Casta caught like a sparrow in a net. You must, therefore, if possible, keep me informed of every new acquaintance that she makes, every fresh place she goes to. I have n't much opinion of a certain mysterious Russian library which she has been to a good deal of late."

"The library in the Rue Pascal?"

"Yes, that's it: Rue Pascal," said Mauglas, with a fire leaping into his eyes which made Raymond start as if he had seen the flash of a rifle.

Later on how many times would he think of this gleam of flame, how often he would bite his pillows

with rage thinking of it through the night in his dormitory, but just now he was all gratified vanity, intoxicated with the idea of seeing all his classmates who went in with him taking off their caps to the famous man who accompanied him.

"Above all, it is necessary for Casta to know that there are a lot of these so-called Revolutionaries in the pay of the Russian police among the frequenters of the Quartier Saint-Marcel, even in the library in the Rue Pascal, and the creamery of the Quatorze Marmites. I shall depend upon you to get that fact well into her head, Raymond."

"You can depend upon me to do that, M. Mauglas."

He purposely pronounced the name Mauglas a little louder in the hearing of the door-keeper at the Lycée and the sound of it made quite a little triumphal entry for him. Mauglas, Marc Javel—evidently a fellow who knew people like this was someone worth knowing, someone worth meeting again in life later on.

The whole of the following day Raymond felt himself still enveloped by the glamour of the scene at Morangis and the magic of that first embrace. In order to prolong the sensation and at the same time to lessen the suffering of the temporary separation he tried to put his feelings into words. But it was no use. The most delicate and decadent of verses, the subtlest prose, expressed nothing of his real feelings.

For the first time he felt that he completely understood the verses of Paul Verlaine, who a few months before had become the poet of the most polished society. During the recess at four o'clock that afternoon he received a visit which agitated him very considerably, so much indeed as to drive both literature and love out of his mind for the time being.

As he entered the parlour where his visitor was waiting for him he saw a tall man whom at first he took for Antonin's employer, and went quickly towards him wondering why his brother was not with him. But he very soon found out his mistake when the man turned round and he saw a shapeless mouth, high cheek-bones, and a ragged beard and moustache bristling round big, yellow, irregular teeth which gave him almost the expression of a wild animal. But he spoke in a low, gentle voice, very correctly, but with a foreign accent.

"Raymond Eudeline, I believe? That is your name, is n't it? Mine is Lupniak. Shh! don't look startled, they may be watching us. Listen; you must tell Sophie Castagnozoff as quickly as possible that she must not be seen in the Rue du Pantheon. The police have been warned. Tell her that I have been quite safe since last night in the place she told me to go to, and she must come there to me some time to-night, otherwise she 'll be arrested to-morrow at Morangis."

Raymond felt his face pale and his knees tremble.

"But what has happened?"

"Someone has queered the pitch." The slang sounded bizarre and brutal in the soft Slav intonation. "There was no time to find out who it was. All that is certain is that the General knows everything, that all meeting-places have to be changed, and that we must distrust everybody." He paused for a moment and then went on quickly: "It was only by a miracle that I thought of you. You can tell me of some way of warning Sophie to-night?"

Raymond thought for a little and then looked up quickly and said:

"Yes, the Chamber is sitting to-night. If you tell



"THE LONG FORM OF THE REVOLUTIONARY."

Pierre Izoard at once he will be at Morangis this evening. You can be certain of that."

"The very thing. Thank you. Good-bye."

A lion's breath on his cheek, a huge paw grasping his hand for an instant, and then Raymond saw the long form of the Revolutionary stoop in the doorway and vanish into the shadows beyond it.

A week of agony followed for Raymond. Supposing that he had been the one to "queer the pitch"? Day and night this thought never left him, but, if that were so, then the information must have gone through Mauglas, the only man he had spoken to—but was that thinkable? Certainly not. Only in the political circles which the critic frequented a single imprudent word, a bit of information given without the slightest intention to injure anyone, might go almost with the speed of a telegram to the ears of the Russian police. He remembered bitterly how idiotically he had swaggered. With the clearness of a man who was just getting over a bout of intoxication he recalled even his slightest intonations as he walked along beside the celebrity strutting like a young bantam-cock. Why should all lads of his age pass through this crisis of vanity, this longing to assert a personality which does not yet exist, like a fledgling cock that is wounded by everything because it still lacks half its feathers? It is bad enough when this absurdity only brings ridicule upon itself, but in this case—ah, Heaven! how much harm, how much misery might it not have caused to others!



CHAPTER IX

THE NIHILISTS' ESCAPE

THE next Sunday was, for Raymond, a terrible contrast to the previous one. There was a cold, fine rain falling as he went in the omnibus from the station to Morangis and the general aspect of things about him chimed in well with his gloomy and despondent thoughts. He had no news from his friends. He had not had even so much as a letter from Antonin, who had been gone two or three days, and to complete his mental gloom he saw that the Mauglas house was shut up and all the shutters closed.

"They 're travelling somewhere," said the conductor in reply to his question.

And that was all the information he could get.

When he got down in front of the bungalow and let the ancient knocker fall on the hollow-sounding door, a sharp echo of it seemed to sound in his heart. A small grating, which had never before been used to his knowledge, opened and Izoard's voice growled :

"Who 's there ?"

And before he could get in he had to say who he was.

In the dining-room he was both startled and shocked to find Genevieve sitting before one of the high windows in the very place where they were accustomed to

have their lessons, and seated on the footstool beside her his brother Tonin, dressed in the Sunday clothes of a labourer.

“What, you 've not gone to London, then?”

It was all that he could find strength to say; at least, that was all that he said with his lips, but we often speak in something more than words. There is the nervous twitching of the features, the lines in the face, the rush of blood under the skin, the sudden opening of the eyes, the start of the whole body, and with all these Raymond had said to his brother: “What are you doing there? Why have you taken my place? Do you know what it costs me to see you there together, the two of you?”

Then both of them, Antonin and Genevieve, in the same mute eloquent language, replied and reassured him. She with a calm sweet smile which could not lie; he with a look of dog-like fidelity in his lashless eyes. Then presently Raymond asked what had become of Casta.

“Casta? Oh, she 's in London, safe and sound!” exclaimed Genevieve.

“Ah, she got away famously!” said Izoard, who had just come back from hanging a formidable chain across the front door. Then he leaned towards Raymond and whispered in his ear: “Do you know that they came to look for her here, in my house?”

“But still we can talk now,” laughed Genevieve. “We are all alone in the house; what is there to fear?”

Then Tonin drew aside the curtain and pointed to the deserted garden of their neighbours, saying:

“You see they 've gone.”

“Yes, but what has become of them?” asked Raymond, with a little shiver.

“ We don’t know. It ’s a mystery,” said Izoard, putting a decanter of plum brandy on the table, a decoction that had been made in the house and was dignified by the title of ‘ Izoard’s Special.’ “ We have been just swimming in mystery for a week,” he went on, as Raymond drank a couple of fingers of the famous liquor to counteract the effects of the wetting he had got on the omnibus.

And then Tonin plunged straightway into the adventures which had befallen him since last Sunday night.

As he was going back to his lodging after leaving Raymond and Mauglas, he had begun to think about things generally : the story of the Russian police coming to Paris, the private message that Casta had given him for Lupniak, who was just then hiding in her rooms in the Rue du Pantheon, the warning that he was to give him to get away to the Place des Vosges as quickly as possible. A dozen such details kept chasing each other through his brain like the nightly chasing of the rats over the ceiling of his two poor little rooms.

When he got home at last and saw his box packed ready for the journey, he could n’t make up his mind to go to bed. His next neighbour, a tall, handsome girl who made her living by embroidering clerical vestments and with whom he had often chatted from window to window, had her soldier lover with her, a noisy, loud-spoken *Chasseur à pied*, and while he was lying thinking, kept awake by this noisy fellow who did n’t go away till two o’clock in the morning, it struck him that, with the noise that was going on, the footsteps on the staircase, and the soldier in the house, there could n’t well be a better time to get Lupniak in unobserved ; so off he went to find him.

When he got to the Rue du Pantheon, just about midnight, Casta's landlady, who had known him for some time, having often seen him come with Genevieve, exclaimed as she opened the door to him :

" Why, what 's this, M. Eudeline ! How late you are ! Mdlle. Casta is not upstairs. She is still in the country."

" Yes, I know," he replied. " I 've only come to get some medical books that she wants."

" Yes, but I have n't got the key. I suppose she 's given it to you. If she has, it 's all right, but you know one has to be careful of these Cossacks about here."

He had the greatest difficulty to prevent her from going up with him, and it would not be by any means an easy matter to get the unknown lodger down again without exciting suspicions. Happily, however, Lupniak was a marvel of cunning and coolness. He came out of Casta's room with a box of books on his back, just as though he were a commissionaire whom Tonin had met unexpectedly on the stairs just in time to get him to carry the heavy box to a cab. The next morning the concierge at the Place des Vosges said to him as he went in :

" Your master, M. Esprit-Cornat, is upstairs. I saw him go up."

He did n't answer in spite of his astonishment, which was by no means decreased when he found in his room, instead of the big, shaggy moujik whom he had brought in the night before, the shaven face and gold spectacles of his employer, whom Lupniak had amused himself by imitating, with the assistance of a portrait which hung on the wall. Protected by this disguise, the Russian was able to go news-hunting in the Quartier

Saint-Marcel, popularly known as Little Russia, and there he learned that a few hours after his lucky escape the French police had made a raid on the Rue du Pantheon, Rue Pascal, and the Quatorze Marmites, had arrested several of the best-known exiles and had transformed Sophie Castagnozoff's lodgings into a trap which they were waiting for her to walk into every moment. It was then that, wishing to warn his friend as quickly as possible, he had thought of Raymond at the Lycée, and later on, when Sophie had got safely to the Place des Vosges, he had devised the plan of disguising her as an electrical workman going to London with an overseer to set up an installation.

Antonin had lent Sophie his clothes and papers, and his employer, as soon as he was informed of the adventure, lent Lupniak all the necessities for the impersonation, even to his old medal as a member of the Constituent Assembly. Then on Tuesday night, while Tonin went into hiding at Morangis, Esprit-Cornat, to make things safer still, went to look after some business at Lyons, and Lupniak and Sophie started for London. That very morning a letter had been received from London, saying that they had arrived safely and enclosing the papers which had secured their flight.

When he had told so much of his story, interrupted, of course, by a hundred impediments and stoppings for words, Tonin went on in the same style to Raymond :

“ Ah, what marvellous people these Revolutionaries are ! They seem as innocent as little children, they laugh like schoolgirls, and yet they assassinate and burn and blow up. That 's just what Lupniak and Casta did while they were waiting to start. They played about just like a couple of children in the rooms and out in the streets, and every minute I was thinking



“DISGUIISING HER AS AN ELECTRICAL WORKMAN.”

that the police would notice them and come and take them. But I wonder how they got to know at first?"

Izoard took up the glass which Raymond had so far left neglected on the table and gave it to him, saying with his old tone of mystery :

" Ah, there is something very strange about that. Sophie says in her letter that the Russian police employ two or three agents in Paris who are wonderfully skilful and perfectly unsuspected—and among them, whom do you think ? Guess ! "

Raymond took the glass with a trembling hand, and asked, almost choking :

" Whom ? "

The name was spoken so low that the rattle of the rain on the window-pane made it inaudible. But they all knew it.

" Yes, I see you are like me, Raymond. It seems impossible to you, and yet, would you believe it ? those two think it perfectly true."

" I have always been frightened of him," murmured Genevieve.

Antonin was going to say something, but the old man did not give him time.

" Just think of it. A writer of his talent, a man who could write that article in the *Revue* of the fifteenth, that admirable study of the ' Dance of the Bees at the Feast of Adonis,' an artist like him to descend to such a trade as that. And then, what a proof of what Sophie said, this sudden clearing out of the whole family—and yet I don't know that that proves so much."

" I beg your pardon, Papa," said Genevieve quietly, " he knew very well that Casta would be arrested on his information and, of course, after that he would n't care to face us. Remember she went on Monday night,

and on Tuesday morning the police were here. There was n't much time lost."

"But Sophie herself may have been a bit imprudent," suggested Raymond, only too glad of a chance of shifting the responsibility of his own stupidity on to somebody else's shoulders.

"Oh, nonsense," said Izoard. "Never in the world. Just remember that neither you nor Genevieve nor even myself, an old Revolutionary who had two years at Mont Saint-Michel under Louis Philippe, have had any of her confidence. She had told nothing to anyone save Tonin, and she was wise, too, for I am quite certain that none of us could have got her out of the hole as cleverly as he has done."

A profound silence followed his words, but outside the crows were shrieking and the rain, set in for the day, rattled on the pane and splashed dismally down over the sodden leaves.

"If you would like to have my opinion of it," said Raymond, who had now recovered his assurance and the patronising air of "the head of the family," "I should say that Casta has been a little too quick in exiling herself, in condemning herself, in short. We know very well that she was no conspirator, and even if she had been arrested I should have gone straight to Marc Javel."

His firm voice, and the way in which he drew up his tall figure and threw back his head struck them all with admiration, not only for him but for the Minister also. He saw the effect that he had produced and went on still more forcibly :

"Yes, Marc Javel. I thought of him immediately when Lupniak came to see me at Louis-le-Grand. I wanted to go to the Chamber at once, but the Lycée

—the rules—I could n't get out, and besides, who would expect anyone wearing a schoolboy's tunic to perform the act of a man?"

"Bravo!" cried the old stenographer, thinking himself for the moment at the Palais-Bourbon. In the official gazette he would have written "Prolonged cheers" after such a speech.

His oratory was a triumph for him, but it was not unmingled with bitterness. No one knew of his stupidity and, at any rate, it had now been made good, but he was seized with a sudden spite against his brother, this urchin whom Casta had preferred to himself as a confidant, and who had been secretive and had played the fool with him for a whole evening. The galling part of it was that he could not but admit that Sophie had chosen well between them. He had endangered everything by his stupidity and Tonin had saved everything—and that, too, had happened in the first difficult situation in which they had both found themselves brought into contact with the things of real life.

Then, as though he could read his thoughts on his brow, Tonin came and said gently to him :

"Yes, Raymond, you are right. I was in too much of a hurry and Tantine has lost her best friend through me, because you know Sophie has gone away for a very long time. Only, well, you know, I—I dare say that you've only got to speak to M. Javel about her, and he'll very soon bring her back from London."

However humble and sincere these excuses might be, they did not satisfy Raymond's pride. To tell the truth, it was for Genevieve's sake, and because of the new place that he had taken in the house during the last week that he wanted to humble him and put him back in his place, so he laid his hand upon his shoulder with that air of

authoritative protection with which he remembered a certain illustrious ministerial hand being placed on his own shoulder, and said :

“ Listen to me, my dear fellow. You are going to London yourself, and, while you are there take my advice and have nothing to do with these Lupniaks and Papoffs, and other heroes of Socialism, of Anarchism. No, not even with our dear Casta herself. All these people are too clever for you. They will take you away from your bench and stuff your poor head up with talk about philosophical Utopias which you won't understand a word of. Never mind about philosophy, that 's not your work, but if you listen to them they will make you something even more dangerous and ridiculous than their own theories—a mongrel, a negro badly whitened, a—a ——”

At this point he felt Tonin's shoulder shake under his hand, and he too felt a pain at his heart, for he was not in any sense bad or cruel apart from his absurd vanities, and, moreover, it was impossible to remain stern and hard in such company and amid such associations, and so he went on :

“ Believe me, Tonin, nothing is farther from me than to wish to cause you pain, but you know our father is no longer here. I am the eldest, the head of the family, and it is my duty. Come now, promise me that you won't.

Tonin looked up at him and stammered out something, just a few broken words, and then he stopped and took his brother's soft and delicate hand between his already toil-hardened palms and then held it to his swollen lips and kissed it.

It was another triumph for Raymond, but his vanity was n't quite satisfied yet, and so he turned to Gene-

vieve and her father, and asked them if they did not think that he had taken the proper course.

"*Princeps juventutis*, I drink to thee!" cried Izoard, raising his little glass. Whenever his emotions got the better of him he always seemed to go back to his professorial days, and that brought his Latin to the top.

And Genevieve, what did she think of it all? Had she been admiring him all this time as her father and Tonin were doing, or was she, perhaps, thinking of the wise counsels of Casta that day when she had first taken her to task about him?





CHAPTER X

AT THE SIGN OF THE WONDERFUL LAMP

EVERY Parisian who knows the left bank of the Seine well will remember having seen, somewhere about twelve years ago at the bottom of the Rue de Seine, a little, narrow-fronted shop with a sign of many-coloured glass globes arranged in semicircular form which struck, as it were, a dominant note of colour through the grey-brown monotony of the rest of the street. At nightfall the globes were lit up and until nine o'clock glowed like a sort of nocturnal rainbow. Underneath the semicircle there appeared in letters, also formed by tiny globes of light :

À LA LAMPE MERVEILLEUSE

Mmes. EUDELINÉ

Eclairage électrique breveté.

The plural title was not exactly correct, for Antonin had hardly brought his mother and sister up to Paris when Dina obtained a situation in the post-office at fifteen hundred francs a year.

It was a most charming little shop with its clear mirrors, its multitudes of little globes, and its simple yet exquisitely clean and neat appointments, but, after

all, what was pleasantest to look at in it was the figure of the old lady crowned with a black cap and long streamers dating from the times of Lamartine and Ledru-Rollin, seated behind the little counter and perpetually dividing her attention between needlework and some novel from the circulating library.

Many a time I have myself looked into this shop and thought what a perfect little abode of peaceful and contented prosperity, albeit of a modest sort, it seemed. But it is possible that I might have had reason to change this opinion if, hidden away in some corner or endowed with the quality of invisibility, I had watched Miss Dina come in one evening in April, 1887, from the office famishing with that sort of hunger which makes a vacuum of an eighteen-year-old stomach about dinner-time, and found nothing ready, nothing to eat, no, not even the table laid. Naturally, there was something said, and that something made the little globes ring.

The premises at the back of the shop consisted of a dining-room with a round table, covered with an American cloth cover, and a few chairs. Under the staircase there was a little black hole with a stove in it which served as a kitchen. The staircase, which was of the corkscrew variety, led up to Raymond's bedroom in front, and opposite to this, guarded by a screen, was the bed which Madame Eudeline shared with Dina. This little chamber contained a plaster Madonna and sundry other devotional accessories which the young girl regarded with the most sincere and lively attention, but which, unhappily, did not seem to assist her very much in overcoming the fits of mad anger to which she had lately become more and more subject.

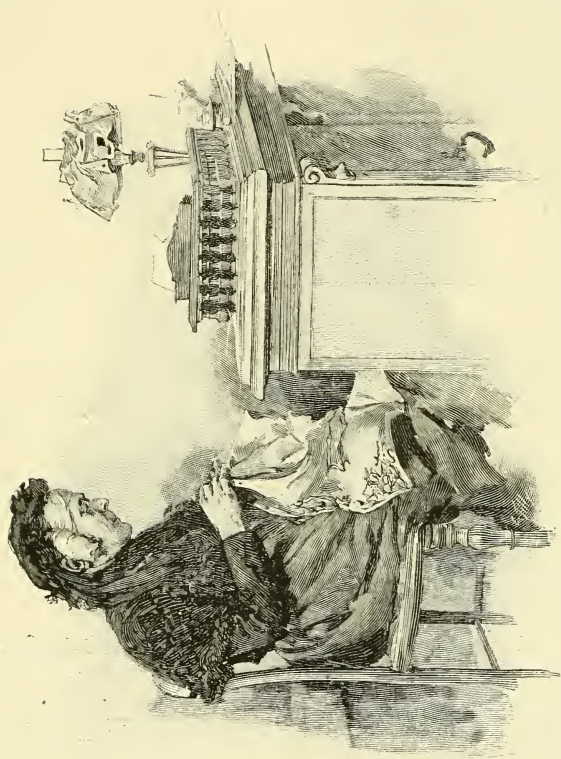
These back premises opened on to a little court

planted with stunted limes, and a corner of this, roofed in, served as a sort of warehouse for a picture-frame maker who occupied the next-door ground floor. Dina often came in through this yard when she was coming back from the office, and it was this that started her temper off on this particular day.

As she passed in front of the shop with her little black-leather wallet under her arm, her head erect, and her hat and veil nicely adjusted, she looked in through the glass screen and saw her mother sitting at the counter and occupying what was left of the twilight, not in reading *The Prison Hours of Madame Lafarge* or *The Memoirs of Alexander Andrienne*, but in touching up the waistcoat of a costume belonging to the time of Louis XV. and embroidered with golden flowers.

The absorbed expression of the old lady and the feverish haste with which she moved her withered hands made Miss Dina a hundred times more angry at the sight of the bare table and fireless stove. When she got inside, the peace of the dwelling gave place in an instant to an impetuous bustle ; her gloves, jacket, and hat came off and were flung on the bed ; drawers and cupboards were opened and shut with a bang ; the poker rattled and rang in the stove and, meanwhile, Miss Dina's fair and delicate features kept twisting themselves up into grimaces and her silky eyebrows and eyelashes contracted and blinked rapidly, almost hiding the pretty amethyst eyes beneath them.

" Just her father over again, her poor father ! " said Madame Eudeline aloud as she stood at the glass door and watched her daughter. How distinctly she reminded her of that terrible and yet well-loved husband of hers whose angry words seemed even still, after ten years, to awaken lurking echoes in her ears ! And yet,



“SEWING BUTTONS ON FOR MY LORD RAYMOND.”

with all, how good she was, so good and kind to everyone belonging to her. Where could anyone find a more charming child or one who performed all her duties better or more cheerfully? As soon as M. Izoard had got her a place in the general office, she had had nothing but commendations from her superiors; they had held her up as an example to the whole staff, and in six months she had been passed on to the Metropolitan Telegraphic system, with its difficult Morse instruments and all that sort of thing. How could it be possible that a girl, otherwise so nearly perfect, so good and sweet and industrious, could be afflicted with these diabolical fits of rage!

“ Oh yes, it ’s all very well, Mother,” grumbled the pretty little fury, “ it ’s all very well to look at me mournfully like that and try and hide that thing behind you, just as if I did n’t see that you were sewing buttons on for my lord Raymond, and here have I for the last fortnight been asking you to mend my satchel, the satchel that I have to carry my meals in and my powder-puff and other things. At any rate it is more useful to the household than that comic-opera waist-coat of Raymond’s.”

Then her mother began gently :

“ But, my child, you know that Raymond——”

“ Is going to dance a minuet in costume at the Foreign Office.”

Dina screwed up her lips as she uttered each word and managed to impart a ridiculous emphasis to the sentence.

“ I wonder how long it is that we ’ve had this precious minuet of marquises and shepherdesses dinned into our ears, arranged, etc., by M. Dorante of the National Academy of Music. What nonsense! Shall

I sing you the tune?—no, I won't; I 'll dance it. See. Tra-la-la, tra-la-la——”

She capered through a few of the steps, humming the air to herself, and, vexed as she was, the effect in the little room was so comic that all of a sudden she forgot her anger and burst out laughing.

“ But you should remember,” she went on more mildly, “ when I come home from the office I am just dying of hunger. There was a time when I used to find a cup of soup ready to keep me going till dinner-time, but since Raymond has been going in for all these things and has visitors up in his garret, the stove has only got to be lit late at night because of the smell, and then when his lordship has had his chocolate taken to him and has gone off to dance his minuets—well, then I can do what I can for myself.”

Madame Eudeline sat out the end of the storm quietly and then, when it was over, said gently :

“ Come, now, don't try to be ill-natured, Dina. You know that you are one of the very first to be glad of his success.”

Dina opened the cupboard and found a little stew left in its jelly and so she sat down and began to eat it, appeasing at once her hunger and her temper. While she was doing this Raymond came down. He had opened his door two or three times while the dispute was going on and had shut it again. At length, when Dina's voice had subsided to its natural tone, he made his appearance as a handsome young marquis of Louis XV.'s time with powdered hair, buckled slippers, and green-satin breeches meeting gaily gartered white stockings. Such was Raymond Eudeline now, four years after that memorable Sunday afternoon at Morangis, as he lounged down the narrow staircase

with the ruffles of his sleeves rustling on the balustrade.

"Ah, so you are there, Mam'selle Dina!" he said, with an affectation of surprise.

"What nonsense, Raymond! Do you mean to say you did n't hear me? Surely I made noise enough!"

Then turning quickly towards her mother she said with a pretty assumption of admiration:

"Yes, he seems to be a very pretty fellow, this favourite of yours!"

And Raymond, having very little taste for the sharp edge of his sister's tongue, turned the conversation by asking his mother whether anybody had been to see them from M. Aubertin.

"No, no one," she said, "but you must remember what I have told you. If anyone did come he would not be shown up. I don't want you to let this man's offers tempt you. A nice thing for you and for us going off all the way to Cochin-China!"

"Certainly not," said Dina, with conviction; "it's not to be thought about."

Raymond looked at them with an air of indecision which suited the expression of his eyes and his patched and powdered features very well, and said:

"That's all very fine, but I believe I was wrong in refusing at first. It's nothing very great to begin with, certainly—private secretary to the Governor and tutor to his children,—but if I once got a footing I should be able to make myself a decent position in a few months. But here in Paris I shall never get anywhere. Even when I get through my law and am called, I should n't be able to do anything for you for a long time, so I'm sure it's much better that I should go away."

Madame Eudeline made a gesture of despair.

"You can't be serious. Why, Annam is nothing but a huge death-trap. Suppose you were to take fever or the plague or anything of that sort, why, we should never see you again, and then what would become of us?"

"You would still have Antonin."

"What nonsense! Besides, you have n't the right to exile yourself. Remember your poor father's last words, and remember that our dear friend Izoard is still with us to keep you in mind of them: 'Raymond will be the head of the house, the support of the family; he will have to take all the responsibilities on himself.' Do you mean to tell me that the head of a family can exile himself like that?"

"But what if he has no means of earning anything for the family to eat?" replied Raymond. And then looking down at his sister he went on: "I'm quite sure that Dina agrees with me there."

"That's just where you make a very great mistake, I can tell you," replied Dina with such a show of indignation that he could hardly believe that he had really heard what she had been saying a few minutes before.

He did n't say anything, but contented himself with a smile; then, turning to his mother, he took the beautiful waistcoat out of her hands, and paid her for her labour with a kiss.

There are some people who, either from coldness or awkwardness, are incapable of bestowing real caresses; there are others who, like Raymond, possess this dangerous art to the point of positive seduction.

"Ah, you rascal!" his mother murmured, reddening like a girl at the touch of his soft, blond moustache.

Just at that moment the door of the shop opened with a violent tinkling of the bell, and the two women immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was someone from M. Aubertin. Madame Eudeline at once went into the shop to prevent the passage of the enemy, while Dina drew Raymond towards the staircase.

But she had scarcely left the room before she cried out in a changed voice :

“ Raymond ! Dina ! Come, quick ! Come, it ’s M. Izoard and Genevieve ! ”

It was about two years since they had called. In fact, the two families had been taking the greatest pains to keep apart. The cause of their quarrel had been nothing more nor less than a political argument between Raymond and the old stenographer, immediately after which Genevieve had gone off to spend a few months with her friend Sophie, who was now practising medicine in England. Then a sudden attack of the blues had brought her back to Paris, and shortly after her unexpected return they had been talking of the Eudelines, and she had looked up, saying suddenly :

“ Let ’s go and see them.”

“ That is a most excellent idea of yours, Tantine,” said the old gentleman, and so they had come.

Dina entered the shop as her mother spoke and promptly flung her arms round Genevieve, who was looking just as pretty as ever, save that her cheeks and eyes seemed a trifle hollower than before. They looked at each other smiling, but almost tearful, while Izoard said in one of his deepest tones :

“ Tantine thinks that after all the blame was all on my side, and that is why we have come first.”

Madame Eudeline wiped the glasses of her spectacles aimlessly and said :

" Well, I don't know. To tell you the truth I have never had any idea what all the fuss was about."

Then Izoard burst out laughing.

" And I don't know that I have, now that I come to think of it."

" Neither do I," said Dina; " all I remember is that it was one Sunday morning when we were hanging up the stew-pot. These two gentlemen got talking about Gambetta and then the dispute began. It was something about the Republic, I think. Tantine, do you remember what it was ? "

Genevieve shook her head and smiled rather constrainedly, and her father said for her :

" That does n't matter. These rows without reason are the most dangerous—just like those vague diseases that nobody knows the name of. At any rate, I am very glad that our dear Filiette has come back from London on purpose to set us right. As for me, I can tell you that I have had a pretty slow time of it all alone in Paris, and to make matters worse, I have had to watch all the degeneration that is going on in the Chamber. The Republic is being drowned in a flood of gold and empty talk. But never mind, we won't talk about that. Now, what have you been doing with yourselves ? The little lamps are going on all right, I suppose, and Tonin is still in his electrical shop, and Raymond, I suppose, will have finished his law very soon now ? Is he happy and content ? "

" Oh yes," replied his mother quickly. " You 'll see him in a minute. He 's upstairs just now, but he 's coming down. You 've told him, Didine, have n't you ? "

But Genevieve murmured in an indifferent tone :

" Oh no, don't trouble him ; it is n't worth while."

Dina, however, exclaimed earnestly :

“ Disturb him ! What nonsense ! Don't you suppose he 's just as glad as any of us to see you back ? ”

Nevertheless, Raymond's delay in coming had already raised a little new cloud and they were silent for a moment or two, when Izoard happened to let his eye fall on the big green volume on the counter and said with a smile of approval : “ Ah, my dear friend, I see you still remain faithful to the literature of our youth.”

“ Certainly, M. Izoard, certainly I do. Just think what true poetry there is in these *Prison Hours*.”

“ And what a monstrous injustice this unhappy lady suffered ! ”

“ Ah, M. Izoard——”

“ Ah, Mme. Eudeline——”

Dina and Genevieve looked at each other and laughed, suddenly brought near to each other again by these familiar phrases, these echoes of a far-off generation of sentimentalists. To hear them was like reading some old familiar and yet half-forgotten story over again. Then the glass door at the back opened wide and a young marquis, whom neither Genevieve nor her father recognised in the falling twilight, came in glittering with silk and satin and gold lace.

“ Why, it 's Raymond ! ” shouted Izoard, stretching out his arms. “ And so you disguise yourself now to receive your old friends.”

Madame Eudeline hastened to explain that her son was dancing in the minuet that evening at the Foreign Office, and that, indeed, he was going to dine at the Ministry in costume with the rest of those who made up the figure.

“ Oh, oh, that is so, is it ? ” said Izoard, lifting his

bushy eyebrows. "Then I suppose there's no chance for me to-night. I came to take you all to *The Four Sergeants of La Rochelle*." Then seeing that Genevieve was looking in a somewhat embarrassed fashion at Raymond, and that he was standing some little distance from her, and looking a trifle awkward also, he said abruptly to his daughter: "Why don't you go and give him a kiss? It's all very well for him to dress himself up as a marquis and all that sort of thing, but he's still our little Raymond for all that."

Happily it was beginning to get dark in the shop, and Raymond was the only one who saw that Genevieve had suddenly turned pale and was beginning to tremble. But he did n't pay any attention to her change of manner, taken up as he already was by his pleasurable anticipations of the evening before him. That first innocent kiss that he had tasted under the leaves at Morangis was a very long way off now.

"And so you are going to dine to-night with the Valfons," said Izoard, as though he had guessed his thoughts. "You are going to see 'La Belle Marques.' She is a Minister's wife now, though she does n't go to the Quai d'Orsay. I knew her at Bordeaux, where I was Professor of Rhetoric, let me see—oh, twenty years ago. Her husband was then—it was just about the end of the Empire—the richest ship-owner in Bordeaux. He was a Portuguese Jew. Old Valfon was then a celebrated clown and tight-rope dancer. He was performing at the Grand Circus while his son edited a little rag called the *Galoubet*. He was a desperate gambler even then, and, well, there was supposed to be something between him and Madame Marques, and altogether it was a nice sort of a family party. He married her, and that's how she got to the Foreign

Office. However that 's neither here nor there, now. But come, young man," he went on, laughing and laying his hand on Raymond's shoulder, " tell me if you 've been putting on all this finery for the mother or the daughter ? "

" I did n't know that the Valfons had a daughter," said Genevieve in a tone that was just a trifle strained.

" Oh yes, a daughter by the first marriage, like the son, Raymond's old schoolfellow Wilkie, you know. Florence Marques, they say, is engaged to the son of Tony Jacquand, the millionaire silk merchant and Senator of Lyons."

" Is n't M. Izoard well posted in everything ! " said Raymond, laughing.

" It 's all a question of proximity, my dear fellow. The Chamber and the Foreign Office are, as one might say, neighbours, and from the one you can see the life of the other. Besides, you can understand that after more than fifteen years of reporting I have a pretty wide Parliamentary acquaintance, and I know a good many of these so-called Republicans. A nice lot they are, I can tell you."

Then he began to walk up and down the shop with quick, angry strides, declaiming on the corruption of the Chamber, the bribery and buying of votes, favouritism, patronage, and all the rest of it. A pretty place, for instance, this, where Raymond was going to dance his minuets. Everybody in Paris knew how much this Valfon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, owed—and nearly every penny of it lost at play—and how much his step-daughter's fiancé has to pay him to save the marriage from being broken off. Yes, it was a pretty state of affairs all round with their minuets and foolishness.

"Never mind, M. Izoard," said Dina dreading lest these terrible politics should end by causing another breach. "Never mind, let him go to his dancing. After all, I dare say we shall enjoy ourselves a good deal more than he will."

Then she slipped one hand through his arm and the other round Tantine's waist and proceeded to state her views as to the best way of spending the evening. They would keep *The Four Sergeants* for a day when they could all go together and she would go round to Melano's, who had the restaurant in the Rue Mazarine, and order a nice little dinner—soup aux ravioli, rice à la milanaise, and estouffato. As it happened, she was not on duty that night, and as soon as Antonin came back and the shop was shut, they would be able to sit down to it in the other room. At the very mention of ravioli the eyes of the old stenographer, an ardent admirer of Garibaldi and therefore, naturally, of Italian cooking, began to light up as he said :

"A capital notion, my dear ! Go and give your orders at once."

"Shall I come with you ?" asked Genevieve.

Dina, who was putting on her hat in the back room, pointed to Raymond and said in a low voice :

"No, no, stop with him and have a chat before he goes."

Genevieve did not answer, indeed, she did n't even seem as if she understood what she said.

As soon as the two young people were alone, they instinctively approached the window as though they were afraid of the shadows, and there they stood watching the nightfall in the court and the last few gleams of sunlight shining on the bits of gilding on the frames under the shed.



“WHILE HE WAS TALKING, GENEVIEVE’S HAND KEPT ON GROWING COLDER AND HEAVIER IN HIS.”

Sign of the Wonderful Lamp 111

"Give me your hand, Genevieve."

Without saying anything she put it out to him and he took it in his.

"How cold it is!" he said, feeling it tremble a little.

"You're not frightened of me, are you?"

"No," she said, in spite of her agitation. "I am not, really; really, I am not."

"Oh, yes, you are," he said. "I know what it is; you are always thinking of that horrible affair up in my room. Yes, I know I behaved to you like a brute and yet you have not complained to anyone. Ah, my poor Tantine, forget it, I beseech you, forget that miserable minute; I shall never be again as I was then, and you are not, you cannot be, anything more to me than a friend, a sister."

A sad, bitter smile trembled round the corners of her lips as he said this.

"You don't believe me, Genevieve. Yes, I see quite well that you don't believe me. But listen——"

And then, less for the purpose of convincing her than to satisfy that longing which all young men have to tell the story of their love successes, especially to a pretty woman whom they had once coveted, Raymond told her in whispers of his amorous triumphs in the world, that great official world which he was going to dance in to-night. He knew what passion, true passion, was now, and he knew how little it was like that youthful frenzy with which he had once startled his Tantine and frightened her away from him for all those long months which had been so dull for him. Ah, so dull!

While he was talking, Genevieve's hand kept on growing colder and heavier in his until it escaped from it by its own weight, but he hardly noticed it any more than he saw in the deepening dusk the expres-

sion, half of irony and half of misery, on the fair face that was inclined towards him and on the lips that were so uselessly near to his own.

He went into all the little details of his romance, from the very first words that he exchanged with his lady-love in the Ministerial box where he had gone with Marques, how he had offered her his arm in fear and trembling, and how she had accepted a bouquet from him—and so on. And then he ended up with :

“ And now, Tantine, you are a woman. Do you think she loves me ? ”

Like all young men of his age, he was tortured by the fear of not being taken seriously, but above all he suffered from the impossibility of receiving his lady-love at his rooms, although she had two or three times expressed a wish to see the room in which he worked, and to see him sitting at his study table. It was utterly impossible for him to receive anyone in this miserable Rue de Seine, and in the society of his mother and sister—to say nothing of bringing a woman of the world to such a place. Ah ! what a horrible thing this family poverty was ! When would he be able to escape it ? Here he was at twenty-two, after having shed quarts of ink in writing and had not earned enough to pay the rent of chambers in town. That was what he wanted, and Tantine as a woman would easily understand why. He wanted carpets and nice furniture and a piano, for Madame Marques was a great musician with a contralto voice that was famous in every salon in Paris.

All this time the night had been filling the little court until there was n't a gleam of light left, and then, all of a sudden, a yellow-white gleam shot across the windows. Madame Eudeline had turned on the electric

lights in the shop and Genevieve had no time to wipe away the tears that were burning her cheeks. Raymond was just as much astonished to see the misery on her face as she had been to find him in this strange costume of his. With a gesture which M. le Marquis must have practised a good many times, and with an elegance of motion which was just a little vulgar, he pulled out of his satin fob a huge, enamelled, gold chronometer, his sole inheritance from his father, and said abruptly :

“ What ’s the time ? Ah, I must be off, or I shall be late.”

“ Very well, then, you ’d better go,” said Genevieve, turning her head away.

There was a sound of wheels in the street. It was the cab which Dina had fetched for her brother, whose costume would have raised the whole quarter. When he had gone up-stairs to get his gold-laced cocked hat and his long cane, Dina stole up and whispered in Tantine’s ear :

“ It ’s silly of you to cry like that. He ’ll never find anyone else as pretty as you are.”

Then she called to the two old people who were still exchanging their recollections : “ Ah, M. Izoard ! ”
 “ Ah ! Mme. Eudeline ! ”

“ We are sending Monseigneur off. Won’t you come and escort him ? ”

The departure was a somewhat melancholy function. The wretched street did not agree with the glittering silver buckles, nor did the dingy cab seem quite suited to the gorgeous costume of its occupant.

“ Upon my word, we might be playing the *Berline de l’Emigré*,” said Izoard, utterly out of temper with this wretched minuet.

Nevertheless, when Raymond had gone, the company speedily recovered their spirits. There was the table to lay, the stove to light, the oil-lamp to trim—for its own use the household of the inventor of the Wonderful Lamp only burnt oil. And then, finally, came the ravioli which speedily sent its piquant and appetising odour into every recess of the little home. Then at length Antonin returned as usual to shut up shop for his mother, and when he found the unexpected party seated round the white-covered table enjoying themselves so thoroughly, his poor, disfigured eyes opened with such a stare of delighted astonishment that everybody burst out laughing. The four years had strongly emphasised the contrast between the two brothers. Antonin was still in speech and bearing the workman ; only now there was an air of responsibility not unmingled with anxiety about him, and in this he resembled less than ever the young gentleman whom they had just seen into his carriage. He was just the same good fellow as ever, and had just the same difficulty in expressing himself clearly.

While he was shutting up the shutters, Izoard's voice growled out merrily :

“ Come now, young man, have n't you finished with your shutting up yet ? You had better hurry up, for if I begin again, you 'll find there won't be very much left for you.”

When he finally did come to the table everyone noticed that there was something peculiar about him. He moved slowly and awkwardly, and his hand trembled so much that for fear of spilling something on the cloth he scarcely dared lift his spoon or his glass to his lips. As for conversation with him, it was a dead failure, and his efforts to reply quickly and co-

herently were even more painful than usual. At last Tantine began to get uneasy and said to Madame Eudeline :

“ I ’m sure there ’s something the matter with Tonin. Has he been ill lately ? ”

Madame Eudeline protested almost indignantly against such an idea. ‘ Tonin ill ! ’ The very notion was absurd. Such a thing had never been heard of. Then the lad himself, as though he considered it his duty to support what his mother said, exclaimed :

“ Ill, oh dear, no, I—I am never ill. It was, you see, only the—well, the surprise of—of seeing you here after so long—you know.”

That was all he was able to say, and after that his emotions seemed almost entirely to deprive him of speech for the rest of the evening. When Izoard wanted to get any news of the workshops out of him and to know whether his employer was still satisfied with his work, Dina had to speak instead of him, and she did it with a wealth of laudatory detail which made poor Tonin feel more awkward and embarrassed than ever.

“ Satisfied with him—with Tonin ? Why, did n’t he know that he already possessed an interest in the Paris house and had a laboratory of his own for his experiments ? And then all the miracles he wrought there, especially this Wonderful Lamp which was going to make all their fortunes and bring them all together again. It was quite marvellous how he had hit upon that. And the very morning that she had been praying for his prosperity——”

Izoard interrupted her here with a laugh.

“ Ah, so you still believe in your fetishes, you little idolatress.”

"Yes, of course I do, and more than ever," she replied, "for it is always after a prayer that some of these things happen."

Izoard turned rather impatiently to her mother and said :

"Then you really do sell these little lamps?"

"Oh yes, a great many of them. In fact, I am beginning to be sorry that I did n't keep Dina with me. I shall be obliged to engage someone soon. But it is n't that that troubles me. That is only a trifle. The real difficulty is that Tonin's presence at the workshop is absolutely necessary for the manufacture of the carbon filaments"—the dear old lady was very proud of being able to use technical terms like this,—“and in a short time he will have to go and do his military service. M. Esprit came to see me the other day to talk about it and see what could be done.”

"But what about Raymond?" cried Dina, without thinking what she said.

Her mother shrugged her shoulders slightly as she replied :

"My dear child, you must remember that Raymond has rights and privileges to which Tonin could not possibly pretend. He is the eldest son of a widow, and the support of the family."

She said these last words almost devotionally, but her daughter did not take the matter quite so reverently and interrupted again :

"I don't quite see that. It seems to me that as things are, Tonin is much more a support to the family than Raymond, and I think we shall find that out when he is gone."

At this outspoken truth, both Madame Eudeline and

Tonin himself flushed violently and gasped in a single breath :

“ O Dina, how could you ! ”

Izoard, still busy with his rice à la milanaise, looked up and said :

“ Well, but what is Raymond actually doing now ? It seems to me that he is more a sort of walking gentleman than anything else.”

“ Pray do not speak of him in that way, M. Izoard,” said Madame Eudeline, almost indignantly. “ All the time that Raymond has lost has been for our sake. In order to get a permanent position he went up for the Normal School, and that compelled him to attend double classes and remain at the Lycée till he was twenty. It is true that he failed at the Normal, but that was not his fault. It was entirely due to the unfairness of an examiner whose philosophical views did not square with Raymond’s. Everybody considered this to be the case. After that, his friend Marques showed him that it would be better for him to study law, so that he could get into the Foreign Office, where he could guarantee him a good appointment and a much better future than the Normal School could give him. In a few months he hopes to obtain his certificate, but before that I trust we shall see him President of the ‘ A. ’ ”

The old stenographer’s heavy eyebrows seemed to twist themselves into notes of interrogation as he looked up and asked :

“ President of the ‘ A ’ ? ”

“ Yes, you must know—the association of Parisian students. He is already a member of the committee, and he has every chance of being elected to the Presidency next month.”

“ And what will an appointment like that be worth to him ? ”

Madame Eudeline replied with a certain amount of dignity in her tone that there was no salary attached to it, and Dina added with a laugh :

“ Oh yes, it 's always that way with the places that they offer Raymond. All dignity and position and no pay.”

Antonin tried to protest, but the words would n't come, and his mother took up the discussion again for him. “ In the first place, this Presidency offered very decided advantages. It gave the *entrée* to all the Ministers' houses. Marques, for instance, Raymond's friend, who had been President the year before, had actually been visited by a Grand Duke. Moreover, this was the only sort of position anyone would like to offer to her son. Only the night before M. Aubertin had come to propose——”

Izoard bounded in his chair.

“ Aubertin, the man that they have packed off to Cochin-China ! There 's a nice sort of specimen for you ! And I suppose he wanted to take Raymond with him as his secretary ? ”

“ Of course I 've not consented, you understand,” said Madame Eudeline. “ Raymond has not the right to leave us, but there is a proof that, if he wished to, he could. Besides, if he only had decent lodgings, a nice room that he could ask anyone into, instead of this garret——”

“ Very well, he shall have one, Mamma.”

Everyone turned quickly towards Antonin, who had at last begun to talk rapidly, just as one of those old clocks which have been stopped and clogged with dust for years suddenly starts off and strikes its way all

round the dial. Yes, he should have a nice set of rooms somewhere on a third floor with new furniture and fine curtains and carpets. But it could n't be ready for him for a few days yet, and until then "mum" was the word.

"Oh, my dear boy, you are too good; come and give me a kiss! What have you been doing? Have you been saving up again?"

"Oh, I 'm always doing that," said Tonin, with a laugh of triumph, "and how could I use the money better than in finding Raymond proper tools to work with?"

Izoard turned towards Madame Eudeline and said:

"The lad talks well, and we know that what he does is even better than what he says. Now, if you will believe me, this question of military service is most important of all just now. Tonin is absolutely indispensable to you, and now is the time to go and see Marc Javel. He does n't happen to be in power just now, but that does n't matter, he very soon will be. Is it long since you saw him?"

"I am afraid it is—a very long time. It is very wrong of me. Tonin has often advised me to, but I 'm always so frightened of these great folks. The places where you go to see them are so gorgeous and there are so many servants about, so many stairs to climb, and then Marc Javel himself overwhelms you with those fine phrases of his. I know they used to make me feel quite deaf. And then, after all, what has he ever done for any of us? He 's given us plenty of fine promises—but what then? They have just been like so many empty pieces of tissue paper."

Izoard, however, insisted.

"I dare say there is a good deal in what you say, my dear old friend," he said. "In fact I am myself com-

ing to believe that Marc Javel is just like a good many other modern Republicans—a good actor who gives flatteries and promises and little politenesses which cost him nothing in exchange for votes. A politician, in short, and you know what their promises are worth. But still, granted all that, he is better than this mountebank Valfon, and besides he has contracted a sacred obligation towards you and your children and we must make him discharge it.”

The name of Marc Javel somehow seemed to fall like a snow-cloud over the party and Izoard’s speech was followed by a little silence, in the midst of which they heard a carriage stop before the door. Then came several knocks on the shutters and Raymond’s voice calling to them. They all jumped up to go and let him in, and as soon as the door was opened he came in crying :

“ Here is an adventure ! ”

His head was bare and the overcoat which he had thrown over his shoulders had got quite white with sleet just in crossing the pavement.

“ Why, it ’s snowing ! ” cried his mother. “ You ’re quite white, and it was perfectly fine only a few minutes ago.”

At this Izoard growled out :

“ Just like this modern spring weather. As cold as the winters used to be, and as capricious as the present generation.”

After this, Raymond began to explain that Mdlle. Helene Molin de l’Huis, one of the shepherdesses in the minuet, had sprained her ankle coming down the steps of her father’s house, and in spite of all that Petersen, the Swedish masseur, could do, they had received a telegram saying that she would be confined to the sofa for the next eight days at least. But she had

sent her costume and all its accessories so that, if possible, a substitute might be found for her.

"And have you found one?" asked Dina ingenuously.

"Yes," replied Raymond, "you, dear."

"Nonsense, you 're joking!"

"On the contrary, no such thing. In fact, it was n't my idea at all. It was Madame Valfon's. She knew that you could dance it very well, because you 've practised it so much with me, and so she said to me as soon as she heard the news: 'Jump into a carriage, and fetch your sister as soon as you can.' And as it happens, you see you have just the same neat little figure as Mdlle. Helene, so here you are, wig, head-dress, everything. Now run up-stairs and get ready."

Dina turned with a pretty little frown to her mother and said:

"What do you think, Mamma?"

And Madame Eudeline, feeling that she ought to make some sort of objection as a matter of form, said:

"But what about your office work to-morrow after such a long night?"

For a moment Dina felt like getting angry. Her office, yes, that was all very fine; but what of the times when she had to stop there till three or four o'clock in the morning sending off Government despatches and reports of dreary speeches in the Chamber? That was a good deal more tiring work than dancing, and yet she had to go again the next day. Still, after all, if she felt any vexation at all it was at forsaking her friends in this way instead of spending the night with them as had been arranged.

"Oh, for goodness' sake hold your tongue, you little hypocrite," laughed Genevieve quite gaily. She had

hardly spoken a word since Raymond had gone away, but now she had brightened up again. "Come now, let us have a look at this costume. Madame Eudeline, you and I will see what sort of a shepherdess we can make out of this dear little telegraphist of yours."

Then, in three journeys, and with infinite precautions, the costume, with all its etceteras, was brought into the bedroom and spread out on the bed. The brilliancy and colours seemed to quite light up the whole room; and when the gentlemen had been requested to go into the shop and the screen had been drawn carefully across, Genevieve and Madame Eudeline set to work to make the toilet amid laughs and alarms and excursions and all sorts of requests called out through the half-open door.

"Raymond, give me your hair powder. 'Tonin, run off to the hair-dresser."

"It 's no use, he 'll be closed."

"Then you must go and knock him up and make him open. We have n't a bit of rouge in the house."

And so it went on. When the ladies were quiet for a minute or two, Raymond began in the shop:

"Come, come, make haste, we shall be late. There 's ten o'clock striking now."

At length the screen was drawn aside and a most charming little Pompadour shepherdess came forward with measured, mincing steps. Dina looked exquisite in her short petticoats, square-cut bodice, and dainty hat perched on the heavy masses of her powdered hair. The skin of her neck and throat was deliciously fair and showed off to perfection a very fine thread of pearls and two tiny little consecrated medals of gold.

"She would n't have any other jewellery," said Madame Eudeline rather reproachfully, for she was

very proud of a few ancient family trinkets which had escaped so many shipwrecks and were now carefully hoarded at the bottom of a drawer.

Dina, however, would have nothing but her two little medals, one of Notre Dame de Fourvières and the other of Notre Dame de Victoires, which she looked upon as amulets and never let out of her possession.

“ Does n’t she look lovely ! ” said Genevieve, turning her round in the light of the lamp.

“ Oh, you dear Tantine ! ”

And then the blue eyes of the little doll that she had just helped to dress glittered with pleasure and she threw her arms round her neck, and whispered in her ear :

“ You need n’t be afraid ; I ’ll take care of him, and see that these fine ladies don’t run away with him.”

But Tantine did not seem to hear, and Raymond said rather shortly :

“ Well, are we ready at last ? ”

Madame Eudeline, however, insisted on a few minutes’ more delay, so that she could satisfy herself that Dina really did understand the minuet.

But in reality it was more to indulge her own maternal pride at seeing her two handsome children so daintily dressed strutting about the dingy little room, bowing and twisting and turning and gliding hither and thither, fluttering their ribbons and going through all the stately frivolities of the minuet. And then, when the little rehearsal was over, the two gaily dressed figures disappeared into the darkness of the court. A moment later the carriage was rattling away over the silent streets with the little Cinderella who had been so magically spirited away from the obscurity of her fireside corner.



CHAPTER XI

THE END OF THE BALL

THE great courtyard in front of the Ministry was all whitened over with hoar-frost and frozen sleet which glittered in the flood of soft light from the big windows, and crackled under the wheels of the few carriages that were left as they drove up from the Quay to pick up the few last-departing guests. Every now and then, when the great doors opened to let some shadowy form escorted by a couple of footmen come out, faint sounds of music drifted out and floated away on the cold, still air of the morning.

At the top of the huge staircase crowded with palms and odorous with roses, a Watteau shepherd, M. Wilkie Marques, private secretary to the Minister, was giving information to a couple of men in plain evening clothes. One of them was the special artist of the *London Graphic*; the other, a society correspondent, was taking rapid notes in shorthand on a little reporter's pad. They had arrived too late to see the minuet, which, by universal request, had been danced twice over, and so M. Marques was describing it to them. He was a little, mincing, smooth-faced man, whose head hardly came up to the chest of the big English artist, but that did n't hinder him from giving his information with an



“A WATTEAU SHEPHERD WAS GIVING INFORMATION TO A
COUPLE OF MEN IN PLAIN EVENING CLOTHES.”

air of superiority which almost amounted to patronage.

“The most charming moment of the evening,” he said, laying two fingers on the artist’s arm, “and the one which I particularly wish you to reproduce in the *Graphic*, was when the two quadrilles of marquises and shepherdesses, four couples in each, marched up this staircase followed by an orchestra of hautboys and violins playing Mozart’s Minuet. Each couple marched in step, keeping time to the music with their movements, and everybody agreed that the rhythm of their motions, the shining of their satins under the laces, the jewels of the sword-hilts, the gilding of the crooks, and the colours of the ribbons and wreaths presented a sight one does not often see in a lifetime.”

“No doubt !” murmured the reporter. “And now could you give us a few names ?”

The secretary sniffed at a wreath of big yellow roses which was twined round the head of the balustrade and began in a formal tone as though he were repeating a lesson :

“Quadrille of marquises conducted by my sister Florence, step-daughter of the Minister, and her fiancé, Claudius Jacquand, son of the Senator, the great manufacturer of Lyons. It was partly on their account that this ball was given. In the same quadrille, Mdlle. Nadia Dejarine, daughter of the Russian General and former Prefect of Police at St. Petersburg. Quadrille of shepherdesses: Helene Molin de l’Huis, daughter of the Minister of Agriculture, who was replaced at the last moment by Mdlle. Dina—a new star in the Parisian firmament, to whom I had the honour of being *vis-à-vis*. You might also mention in the quadrille of shepherdesses Jeannine Briant, a niece of Marc Javel, a

former Minister and a future one too, for the matter of that ; Octavie Roumestan, a daughter of the great leader of the Right. Now let me see who else——”

Before he could think of any other names there sounded a run of arpeggios on a piano, with the loud pedal down, from the drawing-room ; and at the same moment a note, or rather a shriek, a full-throated yell, in a woman's voice began Banville's beautiful song :

“ Ah ! quand la mort que rien ne saurait apaiser
Nous prendra tous les deux dans un dernier baiser. . . .”

After the “ Ah ! ” the voice rumbled and dropped into a rapid, breathless diminuendo, and finally died away in a whisper.

“ Madame Valfon, my mother, the wife of the Minister,” whispered the young shepherd in reply to the mute interrogation of the reporter. Then he added in a lighter tone : “ She has sung several times this evening, but you see she has a little voice left still.”

“ And now, with your permission, I will say good-night,” said the big *Graphic* artist, leaning over his sketch-book as though crushed under this musical avalanche. And the reporter, who had been on his legs with him the whole day and the greater part of the night, seemed equally glad to excuse himself.

They were the last two to leave, and the secretary saw them out to the porch, and stood there for a moment shivering in his silks and satins as a bell sounded the Angelus from somewhere on the other side of the pale mist which hung over the Seine.

“ You are fortunate, gentlemen, to be able to go and take a little rest,” he said as he shook hands.

The reporter vanished without replying, but the *Graphic* man, who was lighting a cigar whose size cor-

responded with his own, looked at him in astonishment, and said :

“ But you 're not going to work at this time, are you ? ”

“ Why not ? The Minister is already at his desk, and I shall have to join him very soon, and then we shall have a little game with Bismarck.”

With this he nodded and with a wave of his well-gloved little ape's paw disappeared into the great hall.

As he went through the deserted rooms littered with the thousand and one relics of the revels, and thought of the sleep that he wanted so much and which he proposed to take until noon at least, he said to himself :

“ I wonder whether they 'll believe what I told them about the game with Bismarck.”

And just at the same moment the *Graphic* artist lounging along the deserted Quay said to himself between the puffs of his cigar :

“ I wonder whether that young ass thinks I shall believe what he said about his game with Bismarck. It would be something like a cock-sparrow having a game with a vulture.”

On the first floor, the private secretary stopped before a buffet which was being dismantled and tossed off a stiff cocktail, and then went on into a little music-room where a woman with long, heavy eyes and lines of weariness on her still handsome face was sitting half singing, half dreaming, with her hands on the keys of a grand piano.

“ Where is the governor ? ” he asked in a low tone.

There was no reply, and, with a glance at the curtains which separated the music-room from the next one, he went on :

“ And Florence ? Has she gone to bed ? ”

The musician looked up at him with an absent smile and said :

“ Florence ? I don’t know.”

Then suddenly she cried passionately :

“ Listen ! ”

And striking a thrilling chord, she sang with all the strength left in her voice :

“ Ah ! si la mort que rien ne saurait apaiser ! ”

and stopped in a sort of ecstasy with fluttering eyelids.

M. Wilkie, who was always bored by any exaggerated sentiment, said coldly :

“ That ’s new, is n’t it, Mother ? I don’t remember hearing it before.”

“ Yes, I only got it to-night, but I have been in ecstasies over it ever since.”

“ Well, it seems a pretty thing,” he said, still coldly.

What she did not say to her son, and what she could not and would not say to anyone, was that only a short time ago in this very place and in the words of this passionate prelude she had given the tryst to the young lover as he had stood over her by the piano : *Ah ! si la mort que rien . . .* At the other end of the room into which Wilkie walked, the master of the house was seated on a low lounge near the card tables, beside his step-daughter.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, a pocket edition of his father the acrobat, with his woolly mulatto head and little white moustache, was chatting with Mam’selle Marques, who, at eighteen, was just as tall and just as much of a woman as her mother. Her betrothal to Claudius Jacquand, the son of the Lyons Senator, had been announced some weeks previously, and almost immediately afterwards Claudius showed

his long, simple visage in the Minister's box at the Opera, for all the world as though he were there on exhibition, between Florence and her mother. A day or so after, Valfon himself announced that the marriage would take place very shortly.

Valfon could not help seeing that there were many advantages in the union for him. If, for instance, the day after the contract was signed he, as President of the Council, undertook to give the vacant Ministry of Marine to Jacquand, Senior, the wealthy silk manufacturer of Lyons, he, in his turn, would undertake to pay Valfon's debts—for he had long been a gambler as ardent as he had been unlucky. Then, again, Jacquand would find the capital for a new newspaper devoted to his interests, and this itself was no small thing, for the support of the Press is just as necessary to those who would keep their position in politics as it is to those who would do the same in literature. Victor Hugo, the most illustrious and experienced writer of his day, had been the first to comprehend this. Valfon had always lacked this source of strength. He had given away appointments, he had used the Secret-Service money to bribe servile pens, but a paper of his own, absolutely devoted to him whether in power or out of it, a weapon always loaded and ready to be discharged against anyone as he gave the signal—that he had never had and that he hoped to find, as it were, in the Flemish and English laces, the silks and satins and chiffons of his daughter's wedding trousseau.

Wilkie walked slowly towards the two.

“Flo, they are going to publish a splendid portrait of you *en marquise* in the *Graphic*. I have given them your photograph and one of Claudius. You will be leading the minuet with him. There was a reporter

there, too, and I made a special point of that—I mean of your fiancé.”

“ Oh, that ’s all over. They can do what they like about that.”

As she said this the young beauty raised her head, and Wilkie saw what his step-father did not see—that she was crying.

“ Why, what on earth is the matter with you, Flo-flo ? ”

And the answer came from the other room, from behind the waving curtains, a full-voice cry from Madame Valfon :

“ Ah ! quand la mort que rien ne saurait apaiser
Nous prendra tous les deux dans un . . . ”

She had n’t time to finish. The Minister had sprung to his feet, almost drunk with rage, his hands clenched, infuriated past all consideration of the proprieties.

“ Will you stop ! Stop, for God’s sake, do ! ”

Florence and Wilkie blanched as they heard him say this. He had never before been guilty of such brutality to their mother before them. Then the curtains were swept aside and she came in pale, furious, and trembling.

“ Be good enough to remember that the servants are still up, and that they can hear you,” she said coldly.

He looked at her for a moment, ashamed of his violence, especially before the young people, and tried to pass it off in a joke, quite forgetful of the ring in his voice which had put his anger beyond all contradiction.

“ I only shouted to try and drown that contralto of yours or, at least, to make myself heard through it,” he laughed with a poor pretence at good humour. “ We

wanted you in here for a moment. Just ask Florence what 's the matter with her."

Without taking any notice of him, she looked at her daughter and said :

" Well, what is it ? "

Florence tried two or three times to speak.

" My marriage—done with—broken off—impossible."

Then her voice broke in a sob, and her mother went and threw herself down beside her on the sofa, took hold of her hands, and asked her again :

" Surely it must be some childish notion, some religious or superstitious objection, but certainly nothing really serious ? "

" Yes—yes, something very serious."

And the miserable little marquise looked at her with eyes swollen with tears and a burning flush under her skin, which with the fast-rolling tears played terrible havoc with her paint and patches.

" Well, but what is the matter ? What has Claudius done ? " said Madame Valfon. " Surely there is no religious dispute between you."

" Oh, nonsense ! " said the Minister, with a shrug of his shoulders. " That can't be. Just to please him I 've consented to the religious ceremony in the church, although I 'm afraid it 'll set up all the backs of my worthy constituents at Belleville. What can he ask more than that ? "

Then Florence, pacified and strengthened by feeling her mother close to her, said quietly, but with suppressed emotion :

" No, Mamma, it is n't that, and it is n't my fault. He wants someone else and he did n't even try to hide it from me."

“What nonsense, you must be going mad!”

“No, Mamma, it is not my fault really. *He* seems to have gone mad all of a sudden about this little Dina—you know, Raymond’s sister.”

“Oh, confound it, this is getting serious!”

Wilkie muttered this between his teeth and Valfon turned on him and growled:

“Serious? Why, what has she to do with him?”

“A good deal, apparently, simply because, my dear sir, this little shepherdess seems to have fascinated the whole lot of us while the two minuets were going on. Old Dejarine, Marc Javel, and that great fellow Numa—the whole lot are bewitched. You know I had the good fortune to be her cavalier. Upon my word, I can’t really see anything wonderful in Claudius taking fire pretty quickly too.”

Valfon was standing up in front of the sofa on which Florence and her mother were sitting; his face was impassive but his nails were grinding into his palms, and this was the sole sign of agitation betrayed by a man who was always master of himself.

“Come now, Flo-flo,” he said suddenly. “Tell us all about it. Tell us just what passed between you.”

“Well, if I must——”

And then the girl began with eyes half closed, her cunningly arranged coiffure crushed against her mother’s bare shoulder and fluttering a little fan of delicate Indian ivory-work which she opened and shut with every word with a noise something like castanets.

“The moment that Mam’selle Eudeline got here in the costume belonging to Helene de l’Huis, Claudius did n’t seem to be himself. He was distracted and out of sorts. He kept on following her with his eyes, and

between the two minuets he was neither here nor there. Nothing would do but that Raymond must introduce him to his sister. They waltzed twice together, and then he took her to the buffet and I followed them there alone. He did n't pay the slightest attention to me after that. I saw the wretched little thing grimacing and mincing over her ice, and actually heard her talking to him about the efficacy of prayer. After all, you were right when you thought that religion had something to do with the quarrel. Yes, it had, for they were talking about it all the time. The little wretch seemed full of theology with her two medals, blessed, I suppose, by the priest, hanging there on her bare neck. Then, of course, I lost patience, and went and told M. Jacquand plainly that if he danced with his telegraph girl again there would have to be an end of everything between us. And then he said, quite coolly, that unfortunately he was engaged to her for the next berline. 'Very well,' I said, 'disengage yourself.' And I watched him moving towards her, while the orchestra was beginning to strike up. He seemed to be hesitating a little——"

"He 's always hesitating," said Wilkie. "That 's just his nature."

"Well, it is n't mine!" said Florence, getting up from the sofa, her cheeks flushing under the streaky rouge and paint at the memory of the insult. "And all the same, he danced the berline with her!"

A flood of tears cut her speech short and the little fan dropped, broken to pieces, on the carpet. Madame Valfon, overcome by her daughter's emotion, though thinking all the while of something very different, took her hands and began to murmur incoherent consolation.

"Oh, that 'll do ! Let 's be done with it !" growled the Minister.

"Oh yes, it *is* done," murmured Florence. "He had the impudence to come back to me for the cotillon that I was engaged to him for, and I said I did n't feel up to it, and gave him the chance of sitting down beside me and making his peace if he could. And instead of that he went back to his telegraph girl and danced away with her until the morning. Don't you call that a shabby trick ?"

Then there came a moment of silence and anguish. The first glimmering of the dawn was whitening the windows and turning the lights pale, and out of the streets came the sounds which told that Paris was waking up. In the house itself they could hear the furtive steps of sleepy servants going about putting out the lights, some just awakened, and some just going to bed—and there, awake with the wakefulness of anger and suffering, these four people sat in the corner of the dismal, ghastly-looking card-room as far apart in ideas and sentiment as they were in costume. The Watteau shepherd, the Louis Quinze marquise, the Minister of the Third Republic in his black dress clothes with the grand cordon of a Russian order round his neck, and his wife in a costume of the Empire—all looking at each other and all hiding the half of their thoughts. Great tears of outraged pride were shining in Florence's eyes, while from her mother's shone the dry light of an unspeakable, unconfessable joy. And, at the thought of all that he might lose through the breaking off of his step-daughter's marriage, Valfon turned to reproach his wife for having caused all this trouble by her infatuation for this gutter family.

“ These—these—what do you call them ? Oh yes, the Eudelines. First you bring this son of theirs with a head like a hair-dresser’s model, who wants to make a fine marriage to save himself from the trouble of working. And then, after the brother comes the sister, this precious little Mam’selle Dina, who, I suppose, in her way is just as much an adventuress as Master Raymond is an adventurer.”

“ For goodness’ sake, hold your tongue ! ” protested Madame Valfon, with a sudden access of energy. “ You are welcome to the daughter and her character. I ’ve only seen her once, and I know nothing about her, but Raymond—no, I will hear nothing against him. He is a martyr to his family, like a young Christ crucified all his life. No, he is too grand, too noble, too far above the range of a mind like yours. Don’t say a word against him. I forbid it ! ”

The fever of the sleepless night, her love, her indignation, the insult that had so lately been put upon her, united for the moment to exalt, to transfigure this woman who had once been lovely, and who, with her lovely shoulders and arms, her shining eyes, and her flushed cheeks, seemed for the moment to recover all the beauty that had once been hers. She was wound up to such a pitch that, if her children had not been there, she would have said in the face of this husband, this wretch at whose hands she had already suffered so much: “ Yes, he is handsome, this lad that you are talking about, and I—I love him ! You hear?—love him ! Now, say anything you please. You will find that I shall have something to say in reply. Yes, I—to you.”

And somehow her husband understood this as if by instinct, and he felt himself on the brink of such an abyss that he thought it best to draw back.

"After all, if I lose a newspaper, old Jacquand will lose a portfolio, for he can't expect me to take him into the Marine after his son has played the fool in this way."

"Oh, Claude does n't care very much about seeing his father a Minister. It would only mean that he would have to go to Lyons himself to look after the factory."

Florence was standing up in front of one of the mirrors taking the flowers out of her hair and chatting more quietly about her misadventure.

Her step-father said : "Go to bed, my little Flo-flo. We have n't heard the last of this. However great a fool this Jacquand of yours may be, he must know that there is no need to marry this little Miss Nobody——"

Florence threw her head back with a jerk and said :

"Ah, it's easy to see how little you know about him."

"That is quite true, sir," said Wilkie, who was amusing himself putting the pieces of her fan together. "Claudius is one of those good young men who would think that he had lost his honour in this world and his soul in the next if he was to make love to a pretty girl without serious intentions. I feel perfectly certain that he is really and truly in love with Dina and that he means to go to her mother and ask for her. But, for all that, I don't think there is much in it. He just swings to and fro like a pendulum, this fellow. I suppose it is because he is so long and thin, and for all this little affair matters"—here he put his pinched, wicked-looking little face close to Florence's—"I will undertake to reconcile you with Claudius before he has strayed too far, and to patch up the broken engagement as easily as I have mended this fan."

She took the trifle, which really seemed to have been put very skilfully together again, and said :

“ And how would you do that ? ”

“ Ah, that ’s my secret, and I shall not tell it to anyone but mamma and I know that she will help us when the time comes. You understand, Mamma ? ”

“ What do you say ? ” said Madame Valfon, as if she was just waking from a dream.

The Minister, who had been taking stock of his wife all this time, said in a half-smiling, half-sneering voice :

“ What is the use of asking your poor mother anything now ? Can’t you see that she is half dead with sleep ? Come along, my children, let ’s go to bed.”

While they were going to their rooms, the splendidly furnished rooms of the official residence, which had been decorated and fitted up under the eye of Wilkie himself, who was the artist of the family, Dina, the innocent cause of all this trouble, was sleeping beside her mother, or at any rate pretending to sleep, behind the screen at the back of the shop. Madame Eudeline would have liked very much to have asked her all about the ball, but the child was half dead with sleep. So, being like a good many other people of her age, unable to go to sleep after a certain hour, the poor mother had all the difficulty in the world in lying still through the night listening to the almost imperceptible breathing of her daughter beside her and the nervous footsteps of Raymond in the room above her.

Although it was more than an hour since he had brought his sister home, Raymond had not been able to make up his mind to go to bed. He kept walking up and down the room, which was so low that every now and then he brushed the powder off his hair against the ceiling.

Every few minutes he would stop and look contemptuously at the little iron bed, the painted cupboard, the pine table, and the three rush-bottom chairs.

Ah, these miserable contrasts of life—the light and glitter and perfume of the ball-room, the silks and satins and diamonds, the bright eyes of the women, and the rustle and sheen of their dresses—and then this ! What evil thoughts might such things easily awaken in the mind of a young man like him without a penny to bless himself with, thoughts of social revenges, of burnings and dynamites, if he be strong and if his distress give birth to envious ambition ! And if he were only weak, how many hours might it make him waste in idle regrets and grumblings and still more vain and sterile dreams !

At length, Raymond took up the lamp and held it above a table loaded with books in the midst of which, in a somewhat loud plush frame, stood a portrait of Madame Valfon in a ball-dress and all the glory of her bare neck and shoulders and arms. He looked at it for several minutes, swelling with pride at the thought that this woman, this wife of a statesman who bulked largely in the eyes of Europe, seated only a little while ago at her piano, had murmured the secrets of her life into his ear, had laid all her moral wounds bare before him, and had whispered :

“ Give me your love, your consolation ! Help me to live——”

And then he remembered how, even while she was speaking, the distant strains of a waltz mingled with the deep tones of her voice. Then a lot of people came near, senators, deputies, ministers, and diplomats, with their green and red and blue ribbons ; illustrious heads were bowed to her, and strange accents thanked her

for her fête. But she never even turned round, scarcely even acknowledged their salutations, with one hand on the key-board and the other just touching the fingers held out to her and all unconsciously thrilling them with the nervous force that flowed through her members. Was it all real now, or was it only a dream, the result of some enchantment that had taken him into another world—a world where he had lived and breathed and rejoiced in his youth and the comeliness of his young manhood, where he had revelled for just a few passing moments, only to be spirited away and awakened here? What price would he not pay if he could only make that the reality and this the dream!

Then he put the lamp down, and presently his mother, who had listened to his every footstep, heard him come down-stairs on tiptoe and fill his water-bottle at the kitchen tap. She whispered to him:

“Have n’t you gone to bed yet, dear?”

“And you have n’t been to sleep either, Mamma!” he answered. “Is Dina awake still?”

“Oh no, she fell into bed like a stone. I suppose she danced a great deal?”

“Oh yes! all night. She was certain to do that. Her minuet was a perfect triumph.”

Mothers often know nothing, or, at any rate, not enough.

“What a little slyboots she is,” whispered Madame Eudeline again. “She has n’t said a word to me about that. In fact, she did n’t look at all in good spirits when she came to bed.”

Raymond came close to the screen and said in a very low voice:

“You’re sure that she’s asleep? Well, then, listen. Our little shepherdess just put everybody into the

pocket of her apron. You have no notion what a success she was. I heard people saying everywhere: 'Who is she? Where does she come from?' Even Marc Javel himself——"

"What, our Marc?"

"Yes, our Marc Javel. He's always at the Valfons now because there's a portfolio vacant—the Ministry of Marine—and he's trying to get it. Dina made quite an impression on him, and he's asked her to go to a ball which he is going to give on his niece Jeannine's birthday. Of course, I accepted in your name and my own, because, you know, Marc Javel can be very useful to us. He is such a good fellow, always ready to do anyone a service. Really, one does get such false ideas about people. Now, for instance, there's M. Mauglas, the author. You remember him, of course. They called him a police agent, watching the Russian refugees in Paris. There were absolute proofs that he was, so they said. Antonin came back from London perfectly certain of it. Well, that's all nonsense. I met him at the ball last night. Everybody was after him and talking about his last study of the Corinthian dances in the *Revue*. He looked very like a spy, I can tell you. Rubbish! And he told us all sorts of wonderful things about the origin of the minuet, and I was quite proud to meet him there, I can tell you."

Madame Eudeline, too, was very proud to think that Raymond and Dina had been mixing with all these fine folk. What a joy it would have been to their poor father if he could only have seen his children going out this way into the best Parisian society!

"And you, Raymond, my boy, what about your successes? You haven't told me a word about them, but of course you did succeed, and you are pleased with it all."

“Beyond everything, Mamma!” he replied, in a low tone, but with decided emphasis.

“Well, my dear, you deserve it all; you are so good and so handsome.”

“Ah, but it is she who is good and beautiful, Mamma! Ah, if you only knew her!”

“Yes, I’m sure she is. I look at her every day when I am doing your room, although I can’t quite understand about her age. Wilkie is twenty-two, as old as you are; but of course I married rather late, and she when she was quite a child, so you told me.”

“Yes, Mother, a child. Her first husband just played with her as if she had been a doll, and the other one has ill-treated her—ah, the wretch! But he had better not go on with it.”

These last words gave Madame Eudeline a thrill of terror.

“Take care, my dear boy, this Valfon is a dangerous man.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid of him. I have been taking fencing lessons every day for the last two years. No, don’t trouble about that,” he went on as he heard her sigh. “Valfon is as much of a coward as he is a scoundrel. He is supposed to be very strong, and they often have him as a referee in duels, but he himself never fights. Well, now, good-night, dear Mamma, or rather good-morning; I am going to bed.”

Fortunately, Raymond had not brought his lamp down with him, and the dim light of the room, made darker still by the screen, did not allow Madame Eudeline to see just the faintest of smiles flitting over the pretty lips of Miss Dina, who had lain there all the time with her eyes fast closed and breathing regularly as though she were in the deepest of slumber, and who, withal, had not lost a single word of what they had been saying.



CHAPTER XII

GALLANTRY

AT the age of twenty-two, Raymond Eudeline, handsome, well dressed, and well groomed, like most young Parisians of his class, had still to experience his first *bonne fortune*. His first adventure with Genevieve could hardly be called such, for with its piteous termination, it was too much like an ordinary adventure with one of the girls of the Latin Quarter. But this tryst with Madame Valfon was the real beginning of his life, the dawn of his manhood. He had been visiting for months at her house, but, with the timidity of youth, he had not realised the extent of his fascination for her.

What is it, this strange timidity which is almost invariably experienced by a young, handsome, and intelligent man in the presence of women ; this unconquerable nervousness of speech and gesture which often goes to the length of awkwardness and even clumsiness, and which women, nevertheless, seem incapable of believing ?

High-strung above all things, nervous from many complex causes of which the principal was not only the want of money, but rather the lack of familiarity with the use of it, was Raymond on what might be

called the first day of his manhood. How many times would he have shown more courage, even to boldness, if he had only had more money, if he had had a corner somewhere in Paris, a place that he could call a home—how many chances would he have seized which, as it was, he had been forced to forego?

This time, however, there had been no escape for him from the formal tryst which Madame Valfon had given. "Three o'clock precisely at the gate of Saints Gervais-et-Protais."

Then all of a sudden had come the terrible question, Where shall I take her? He thought of a restaurant near the Bastille, kept by a woman who used to sing at the Lyric Theatre, and a friend of Antonin's. The two Eudelines had often dined there, and Raymond remembered in connection with this place, that it had two entrances, one on the Boulevard Beaumarchais and the other on the Rue Amelot.

But the money! That terrible question still remained unanswered. His expenses for the ball at the Foreign Office, his costume, his gloves, his hair-dresser, and cab hire, had emptied both his mother's little treasury and his brother's pockets. From them it was impossible that he could expect any more. The whole night he had lain awake on his little iron bed in his garret at home, wondering where on earth he was going to get the money, when suddenly the name of Alexis, his father's old cashier, for whom he had obtained a similar berth at the Students' Club, occurred to him. The clock of Palais-Mazarin, which regulated all the comings and goings of the whole Quarter, including those of the emporium of the Wonderful Lamp, struck ten. He jumped out of bed and dressed quickly, feeling that at last he had hit on the right man.

His hopes, however, were destined to speedy disappointment. As soon as he got into the little room which was used as the cashier's office, he found the servant just lighting the fire, and when he expressed his surprise at not finding M. Alexis in his place at such a late hour, the servant, to his unutterable disgust, turned round and said :

" Oh, he won't be here all day, and I don't think he is coming to-morrow either ; he has gone to the country to his niece's wedding."

There are some circumstances in life which give to little disappointments of this sort the importance of catastrophies. Raymond stood for a moment or two as if stunned by the news. Whom could he go to now ? One of his good friends on the club committee, perhaps, and perhaps not. Besides, what about his Presidency ? It would be simply fatal to his chances to let any of them know that he was hard up for a few louis. There were one or two other friends, so called, about Paris, but he had always posed as a well-to-do man about town before them, so they were not to be thought of. Then another idea struck him.

He went to the desk and scribbled a few lines and said to the servant with an air of haste and importance :

" Here, boy, quick, take this to M. Marques, at the Foreign Office."

During the acquaintance of these two young men, it had always been the poorer who had lent to the richer, for Marques, even while he was still at the Lycée, had been wont to say cynically, " I never lend, but I always borrow when I have a chance."

Imagine, then, Raymond's astonishment as well as his delight when the boy brought back his reply from the Quai d'Orsay :

“ Three louis, my dear fellow, with pleasure ; take five and don't trouble about thanking me, because I am going to ask a favour of you which no money will pay for. I shall expect you at nine in the smoking-room of the club. I am going to meet some of the other fellows there for a chat about your Presidency, and after that I shall want to say something to you on the subject which is nearest to my heart.”

Whatever this strange request may have meant, Raymond never gave a thought to it, intoxicated as he was with the anticipation of his first rendezvous. He would think about nothing but the preparations for it, engaging the private dining-room, seeing that everything was in order, sending in the wine, getting the cab, and so on. At length, a little before three, his cab was standing before the gate of Saints Gervais-et-Protais, an old church near the Hotel de Ville where people often went to hear religious music executed by one of the finest organists in Paris ; anyone seeing a great lady of the official world like Madame Valfon alighting from a cab opposite to the door would naturally come to the conclusion that her object was to book seats for one of the recitals which were to take place in the following Holy Week.

He opened the door. She got in and sat down beside him, said “ Good-afternoon ” in a whisper, and then, taking one of his hands between her little, daintily gloved ones, she pressed it to her lips under her veil and then sat motionless.

For some time they went on like this, pressed one against the other in silence as the cab rumbled along to their destination. Although she was so much older than he, she was by far the more agitated of the two. She was one of those women of the world in whom a perpetual care of her good looks took the place of vir-

tue. It was, in fact, to her not unlike what the preservation of her voice would be to a great singer. As a matter of fact, in a life that had been full of temptations and where love-making seemed to be the first concern of everyone, "La Belle Marques" had never given her heart away but once, and that was to this wretched Valfon. That, too, had happened so long ago that this new passion of hers was so fresh, so nearly original, that she could hardly have believed that she was telling anything but the truth when she assured her young lover that this was the first love of her life. As for Raymond, he looked at her out of the corners of his eyes, curious, nervous, and wondering to find her so young, and thinking all the while of his mother's question : " But how old is this woman ? "

He had never asked himself the question before, simply because a youth, however much he may be in love, is always too much preoccupied with the effect that he himself is producing with his own appearance, as he sees it in the mirrors, which are never large enough for him—in a word, he was too much preoccupied, too full of the glory of his first conquest to look at her too narrowly. Besides, it is not a very easy matter to fix the age of a society woman like her, with all the resources of the toilet at her disposal ; and if men of maturity and experience can be deceived in this way, how much the more easily the twenty years of Raymond Eudeline ?

The carriage stopped at the door which opened from the Rue Amelot, where one of the waiters was looking out for them. He took them into a dark passage to the office, and as they went they could hear a woman's voice singing a German song to the accompaniment of the piano.

“That is Schubert’s ‘Dwarf,’ I recognise it,” whispered Madame Valfon; “you very seldom hear it sung in France.”

She spoke in a fairly firm voice, but Raymond could feel her trembling on his arm, and her emotion gave him a pleasing sentiment of virility, of protection.

As they went towards their room a door opened suddenly, someone called for the waiter, then the door shut quickly, but not so quickly that they did not catch a glimpse of a table with bottles and champagne glasses on it and a man sitting near.

“We have neighbours, I see,” said the lover, gaily, as though he would assuage the agitation of the heart that was beating so near to his own.

She did not reply, and only seemed to breathe freely when they were at length in their own room.

It was a good-sized room lit by a window opening on a courtyard covered with glass.

“That would be rather convenient in case of a surprise,” was Raymond’s somewhat unheroic reflection as he looked out and saw a narrow balcony under the window from which a flight of steps led down into the yard.

“Now, dearest, tell me all that you have suffered.”

She had thrown herself into a low arm-chair near the fire. He had stretched himself out on the carpet at her feet, and was looking up to her with his bonny golden curls clustering about his forehead, and his handsome face flushed by the reflection of the fire and a glass of wine which he had just drunk. The night before she had told him the story of her life, of the long martyrdom that she had suffered from her husband’s persecutions, and now to-day she wanted him to tell her his story. But how was he to make a story out of

that dull schoolboy existence of his, unless he were to put a little romance into it? And so he gave his imagination play.

Madame Eudeline, Antonin, Dina—good, devoted, and long-suffering—coalesced into a monster, a blind and deaf Moloch which he called the Family, and to which he sacrificed his flesh and blood, his very soul itself; and the little shop at the sign of the Wonderful Lamp, this dear little nest filled with life and warmth and love, became the den in which this monster devoured his sacrifices.

And yet, after all, in spite of the untruth of all this, there was, strangely enough, no trace of malice in it, for Raymond was not vicious in that sense. He was only one of those weak, puerile natures which grow old without ripening, and his story was really more the romance of a child than the sober statement of a grown man.

Leaning upon his shoulder, drinking in the love from his eyes, Madame Valfon murmured at the end of every sentence :

“ My poor Raymond ! Ah, my love, how you must have suffered.”

And then again :

“ Ah, what a splendid book all that would make ! ”

But when he reached the sentimental part of his romance, when he began to tell how he had sacrificed to his family the love of the adorable young girl whom Madame Valfon had seen in the reception room at Louis-le-Grand,—in this part of the story Genevieve became a young lady of exalted birth, and the good Izoard an old Provençal marquis, a metamorphosis with which the old man himself would have been anything but pleased,—ah! then Madame Valfon lost con-

trol of herself entirely at the idea of such generous abnegation, and took his golden head in her hands.

The wood in the fireplace blazed and crackled, sending little wavering streams of light across the carpet.

Then suddenly, there was a swift rush of shuffling, hurrying feet along the corridor, and they heard a voice, choked with terror, whisper as it passed their door:

“Madame, madame, quick—your husband!”

For a moment they looked at each other with blazing eyes wide open with fear.

“My husband! Save yourself, quick!” murmured the agonised woman, and almost at the same instant she had sprung across the room, and had flung herself into a tall cupboard, while Raymond, remembering the balcony over the courtyard, rushed to the window. He was just opening it when a woman’s scream answered the bursting open of a door close by, and he stopped to listen. It was not for them after all; but how near it was, and how terrible if it had been! Then with shrinking heart, he stood still and heard on the other side of the wall a tumbling and crashing of furniture, then a sound of a struggle. Not a word or a cry, only the moving of feet and the heavy breathing of men in a struggle for life or death, and then a last sigh, longer and deeper than the others, and after that the soft, heavy fall of a body from which the life had suddenly gone out, falling, as Dante says, “as a corpse falls.”

At the same moment a window opened quite near and a figure passed swiftly across the window. The murderer escaping, no doubt, and trying to get to the other staircase. But why should Raymond have got the fancy that he had seen the face before? There was no

time to remember anything ; in an instant the window was blank again, the vision had vanished like the creature of a dream, leaving so terrible a reality behind it.

Then, on the other side of the wall, there was the sound of moving something heavy and inert, and a voice said : " Not there ; lay him over here ! "

He heard the floor creak under some great weight, then there were more footsteps down the passage, some slow and deliberate, others hurrying and mingled with whispers and mutterings.

" Commissionaire—the doctor, quick ! "

And while Raymond was listening to all this with his ear to the wall and his whole body bathed in a cold perspiration, he seemed to see again the room into which he had got a glimpse as he came along the passage, only this time the big man was no longer sitting by the table where the champagne bottles and glasses were. He was lying with his eyes staring and his throat gashed and bloody.

" Oh, how awful ! What shall we do ? "

Raymond turned and saw Madame Valfon standing beside him, shivering and white to the lips.

" There 's been a murder in the next room. You heard it, did n't you ! " she muttered. He did n't reply, and all the time that there was the slightest noise going on in the next room, they stood there staring at each other in silence.

But at last, one by one, the sounds died away, and it seemed as though the silence of death was spreading itself in icy and mysterious waves through the building until, at length, the whole floor was silent and deserted. In their own room it was growing darker and darker, and only the mirror reflected a little daylight. Mechanically Madame Valfon went to it and put up her

hands to straighten her hat, and then, turning to him, said piteously, " I have been horribly frightened ! "

And he, too, his limbs still trembling and his soul shaking within him, was not, after all, very sorry to agree and to escape as soon as possible from the ill-omened trysting-place.

In the smoking-room of the association where he had told Raymond to meet him, Wilkie Marques had arranged that night a committee meeting, and some time before nine o'clock he started to work in support of his friend's candidature. The smoking-room at that period was on the second floor in the Rue des Écoles. It was a little room, adorned with a few lithographs that had been presented by the Society of Fine Arts. There were crippled chairs standing round the walls, and on the chimney-piece there was a jar of spirits of wine in which hung a scrap of the skin of Pranzini ; this served as a sort of pendant to the bust of Chevreul, which had been insulted by the scratching of matches on its learned nose. Happily for the greatest scholar in France, smoking had somewhat gone out of fashion lately among the young gentlemen of the schools and so the place was now used more as a sort of debating-room. There was a good deal of excitement going on at the moment over the election of President, which had been brought on some months earlier than usual by the abrupt dismissal of the recent holder of the post.

Marques, as an ex-president of the association and also in consequence of his position as private secretary at the Foreign Office and of his relationships with the Ministry, was the most important personage in the place, and just now, copying the Minister, according to his habit, as closely as he could, he was declaiming to his " dear comrades " on the folly of regretting the

change of office which was about to take place, and he had just finished an elaborate exposition of this dismissed President's varied faults and failings when Raymond entered right in the midst of the applause which followed. The warmth of his reception, the effusive shaking of hands, and the smiling, approving faces which he saw all about him gave him a very flattering idea of his chances of success. Even the bust of Chevreul itself seemed to smile a little more broadly and its nose appeared to whiten a little in his honour.

"Ah, well, Raymond, my fine fellow, I suppose you were pleased with it, and it really was a piece of pure good luck!"

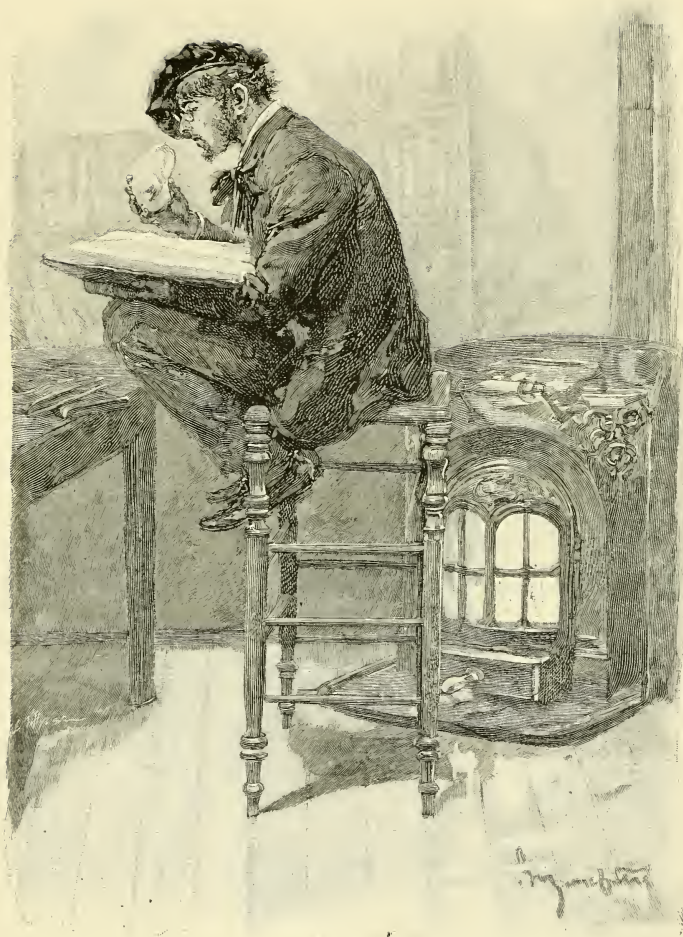
Then Wilkie suddenly changed his tone and said :

"You must n't take any notice of my fooling ; it's only a manner I assume in assemblies like this. In reality, I have very much more serious matters to think about."

Then, taking Raymond by the shoulders with a gesture of unwonted affection, he went on : "Come along, let's go out. I never feel a bit comfortable in this Lilliput Parliament."

They went out together, and as they were walking arm-in-arm down the Rue des Écoles, Wilkie continued his little homily :

"There's nothing after all like one's actual presence, on condition that one does n't abuse it. They had just been hearing all about you, then they saw you, and now let us leave them under a good impression. So far as I am concerned, your cause is gained, and you will be President in a fortnight, especially if you take the trouble of leaving your card on all the members of the committee. It's not usually done, but still it's just what the candidates for the Institute



"READING UP LECTURES IN A GARRET."

do, and it will help to decide the doubters. The only thing is, you must be careful not to go in. Just your card and your compliments ; anything more might be awkward. You see, a good many of these fellows live with their people in a pretty humble sort of way. Of course, in the association you hear them talking about their gallant adventures, their London tailors, and all that sort of thing ; so of course you can see that they would n't exactly like to be caught dining off vegetable soup with papa and mamma on the fifth floor, or reading up their lectures in a garret."

"One like mine !" said Raymond, involuntarily, with a sudden flush of shame at the remembrance that Marques had been to see him there once.

"Oh, yours, my dear fellow ! Why, that 's a paradise compared to some of them ; or, at any rate, it has something that makes it a paradise."

Wilkie stopped for a moment and leaned on his friend's arm as though he were oppressed by the weight of the avowal he was going to make.

"My dear Raymond, I dare say you guess that I have not brought you out here to moralise about these things, and instead of talking twaddle of that sort I 'd better get to business at once. I love your sister, my dear Raymond, and I have loved her from the very first moment that I set eyes on her. You remember the time, don't you, that day when we met her coming back from the office in her working dress ? That is how she first entered my eyes, and through them my heart—to remain there forever. I have struggled against it, for I feared that it might become a madness with me, that it might interfere with my progress in life ; but when I saw her the other night at the Foreign Office, when I saw the admiration, the enthusiasm, that she excited,

then I began to fear that someone else would be before me, and would take her from me, and so I made up my mind to speak to you."

Raymond was so overcome by this avowal that it was some little time before he could answer, and Wilkie began to fear that he was already forestalled and that there was an engagement between Dina and Claudius. He was, however, soon reassured, when his friend said :

"Of course you know, my dear Wilkie, that my sister has no fortune."

"Nor I either, for the matter of that !" laughed the other, "and besides, under any circumstances, we could n't marry for eight or ten months yet. By that time, Valfon will have got me a berth either at the Treasury or the Council, unless I have the management of a big paper which Claudius Jacquand, my future brother-in-law, is going to find the money for. His father, you know, is a very rich man, and he has a very considerable fortune of his own as well, which I hope to be able to draw upon to a certain extent for some of my little enterprises. At any rate, I can assure you, my dear Raymond, that your sister, if she is inclined to take me for a husband, will not exactly marry a pauper, and that I shall be only too willing to bear my share of that heavy burden which you have borne so long and so bravely. In the meantime, I hope that by asking for your sister's hand so far in advance I shall have something of a chance, for I propose to lay my case before your mother at the earliest possible moment so that no one shall forestall me and rob me of my happiness."

As he said this, the two friends turned the corner of the Rue de Seine, and far away down the street they saw the glittering sign of the Wonderful Lamp. Ray-

mond remembered something that Dina had said about miracles which might happen about a place that looked as if it had come out of the Arabian Nights, and here, behold, a miracle already !

He felt that he could almost have clasped Wilkie to his bosom in the transport of gratitude and joy into which his request had thrown him. But his vanity stopped him. He knew that in a few days he would have a nice room where he could receive him and his mother more comfortably and in better state than he could in the little shop, open as it was to everybody. So, to the great astonishment of Marques, who hoped for something better, although he managed to conceal his disappointment, Raymond contented himself with promising to convey his request to his mother and to let him know her answer as soon as possible. The wind, sweeping cold along the empty Quay, had thoroughly chilled them during their walk, for they had strolled along slowly, absorbed in their conversation, and often stopping involuntarily, so Wilkie proposed that they go into the Café d'Orsay, which was still open, to get something to warm them up a bit. They had scarcely seated themselves when their attention was attracted by the conversation of some officers of dragoons who were sitting round an old grizzled colonel.

"Yes, I knew General Dejarine in the Crimea," said one of them; "he was a cavalry lieutenant like myself on the staff of one of the general officers, and I remember that during two of the armistices we met and drank to our respective sweethearts in the stuff they call champagne in the canteens. He always seemed to me one of those vigorous fellows who would always die a young man at whatever age he went off."

One of the officers, whom Wilkie knew slightly from

having breakfasted with him two or three times at the Café, threw him an evening paper containing an account of the death of General Dejarine, former Prefect of Police at St. Petersburg, who had been caught that afternoon by an injured husband and killed.

"Where did that happen? Is it known?" asked Raymond, with a sudden thrill.

Wilkie passed him the paper, and said: "There you are. In a restaurant near the Bastille." And while Raymond was reading he turned away and joined in the conversation of the officers.

"Yes, I remember that almost the last time the poor fellow came to the Foreign Office he sat for more than an hour in my room telling me about his latest adventure, I dare say the very one that brought him to his death. She was a fine, tall girl in a shop in the Rue de la Paix, and she took the route of the Bastille Madeleine every morning. The husband is a designer in the Marais. He works in a bronze factory. He used to put his wife into the omnibus every morning, and half-way through the journey the General used to get in and sit down beside her, or as near to her as he could get. That sort of thing went on for three weeks. Just fancy standing outside an omnibus office, in weather like that we've been having lately, every morning for three weeks! And at last, as I say, he came to see me at the Ministry to tell me that she had given him a rendezvous. The old fellow was vastly pleased with himself, but I could n't help saying: 'Take care, General!' although as a fact I thought him much more likely to go off in a fit of apoplexy than to be killed in this way; he looked just like it."

The officers had risen and were standing round Wilkie while he was speaking, and Raymond bent over

his paper buried in thought. This, then, was the drama which had been played out so near to him, and Dejarine was the big man who had been stabbed within a few feet of Madame Valfon and himself! But the other, the man whom he had seen flitting past the window, who was he? The husband, no doubt, but, if so, why should he want to run away when he had the law and the police on his side? Then, again, that half-remembered face, that momentary look of recognition—in which corner of his memory must he look for them? At this moment, as though to answer his question, a voice said from the group beside him:

“The thing that puzzles me, but which the papers don’t seem to take any notice of, is that nothing more has been heard of the husband, or, at any rate, of the assassin. Considering the General’s personality, and the fact that he was former Minister of Police in his own country, a good many things may have been possible, and this utter disappearance seems to me a trifle mysterious. How was it, for instance, that the Commissioner who was called in to take the depositions did not have the place closed at once and examine everybody that was found on the premises?”

Raymond felt himself turn pale with terror at the bare thought. He saw himself caught there and forced to give his name and the name of the woman who was with him. Imagine the wife of a Minister in such a fearful situation, placed at the mercy of a common policeman. All the horror of what he had actually seen had vanished at the mere thought of what might have been. No, never again would he run the risk of such an adventure!



CHAPTER XIII

ANONYMOUS LETTERS

“ IF Claudius Jacquand wishes to know where the little telegraphist, to whom he wishes to give his name, goes every day between five and six after leaving the office, let him stand out of observation under a porch and watch the door of the Central. The writer can guarantee that he shall be satisfied.”

In the elegant ground-floor flat which he shared with his father in the Rue Cambon during the session, Claudius stood staring out of the window of his dressing-room crumpling this anonymous letter up in his hand. Ever since the ball at the Foreign Office and his meeting with Dina, he had, from time to time, received anonymous letters like this, scribbled in a half-legible hand along the tops of newspapers and fashion journals, bill-heads, and any odd scraps of paper. But, for some reason or other which he could not understand, none of them had excited him so intensely as this one. He straightened it out and read it over again, saying out loud every now and then in broken sentences between the lines :

“ No, I won’t play the spy on her, I won’t go and hide myself in any porches. I will just go straight to the Central Office and ask for Mam’selle Eudeline, and

I will tell her—yes, my God, how shall I tell her? Yes, I must tell her that, after hours of torture, of madness, there has come to me one fatal thought, wrecking my dream of happiness, the thought that I am not strong enough to do what is needed to realise it—that I cannot quarrel forever with my father, that I cannot banish myself from the world he has trained me to live in. For the sake of her happiness and mine, I must ask her to give me back my promise. Yes, that is what I must do.”

This determination once taken, Claudius felt himself freer in mind and standing more firmly on his long legs, and he started dressing to go out with renewed vigour. The poor fellow forgot the countless other decisions that he had come to during the last forty-eight hours, and how he had cast them all away from him with just as much enthusiasm.

When he found himself alone on the Quai d'Orsay he began to think the matter over again. He saw more clearly the consequences in which the rupture would involve him with Madame Valfon, who was such a delightful hostess and such a valuable friend, and with Valfon himself, who boasted that he never forgave an insult or an injury—this same Valfon from whom his father expected his appointment to the Ministry of Marine as soon as the marriage contract was signed. Where would he find the courage to face this terrible father of his, with his bitter laugh and his terrible irony—for Tony, as he was called among his familiars, was one of those men who would never get into a passion. He was an old *roué*, who had killed his wife with sorrow, and who had reached his seventy years without a single illness except the rheumatism which he had caught at the inauguration of a statue at

Lyons, and which had kept him there for the last fortnight. Claudius was expecting him every minute in the Rue Cambon and, on the whole, he preferred to face the anger and contempt of Dina rather than the cold-blooded vengeance of his father.

In accordance with the minute information which he had received from her, he presented himself at the office about eleven, just as Mam'selle Eudeline had put on her working blouse and seated herself before the instrument. He had prepared all his speeches carefully beforehand, for he was afraid to trust his emotion when he found himself with her. There was, however, one thing which reassured him. He quite expected that the working dress of the little telegraphist would be so different from the costume of the Watteau shepherdess that it could hardly fail so far to disenchant him that his task would be somewhat easier. As it happened, it was exactly the opposite that came to pass.

When Dina came out on to the landing in her long black blouse, which made her figure look rather larger and more mature, her face even more delicate and child-like, her complexion more rosy, and her heavy hair yet more delicately golden, Claudius stood and stared at her, astounded, vainly seeking either ideas or words. Never had he seen such a vision of grace and youth. Beside it, beside the real Dina, the shepherdess of the other night only seemed a painted doll. He took hold of the balustrade to steady himself, and while he was standing there looking at her she said to him sweetly and calmly :

"I was sure I should see you to-day ; I prayed so hard to Notre Dame de Fourvières, and I was n't a bit surprised when they came to tell me that you were here."

Leaning against the balustrade quite close to him,

and utterly indifferent to the people who were going constantly up and down the big staircase, she told him all about the strange fancy of Wilkie Marques and the proposal with which she was threatened. Raymond himself had told her nothing about it. It had all come through her mother.

“ But you must understand, my dear Claudius, that I have not said a word about your intentions, because I knew that you wanted to tell your father first. I have done this because you wanted me to, but it has been rather a trial to me, for M. Wilkie is very eager to get my answer, and my mother keeps pressing me to give it.”

“ But are you in love with this Wilkie ; do you even know him ? ” asked Claudius, whose southern pallor was all of a sudden suffused by a jealous flush.

Dina’s reply was lit up by a merry smile. In love with this little fellow ! What an idea ! Only he was her brother’s oldest and best friend, and of course she could n’t help feeling a little flattered at his proposal, all the more so as he intended to make it in the regular way through her mother.

When Claudius answered, he was so agitated that his long gloved hands touching the balustrade shook it perceptibly as he said :

“ This fellow is always doing something in the dark. He is more of an imp than a man, and his character is as rotten as it can be. He boasts of it himself. What does he want you for ? I should like to know what there is under this offer of marriage. I ’ll find it out ; but I am certain now that he is hatching some wickedness or other.”

Then, still calm and smiling, she looked up at him and asked :

“ Well, then, what shall I say to him ? ”

Ah ! that was the question, and he himself had no notion how it was to be answered. He felt himself seized with a sudden desire to take her just as she was, to take this little dainty jewel of a girl, half woman, half fairy, up in his arms, and carry her off like a thief. That was his one thought just now, and it was exactly the same that he had had the first time he saw her. It was an almost irresistible impulse, a madness alike of spirit and flesh. But how was he to explain this in conventional words and on a public staircase like that ? Then again, he was a poor hand at expressing his thoughts, though it is true that words count for little where there is true passion.

As it was, he did n't say a word of all the speeches which he had prepared. He even forgot all about the anonymous letter. Having come to ask for his promise back again, he ended by engaging himself with her ten times more deeply. As for his father, he would go and send him a long telegram explaining everything, and, although the reply would make no difference to his feeling, he would bring it to her at once.

“ Oh no, not here, that would never do ! ” she said quickly. “ Why, if I were to see you here two days running, everybody would be talking about it. They're such gossips here, you know. For instance, just now one of the superintendents went by, and from the way he looked at those light gloves of yours, I know that the whole office will be talking about them.”

“ Well, but I could wait for you when you come out.”

“ Oh no, that would be worse still ! No, give the reply to the door-keeper ; if you tell him, he will bring it up to the dressing-room, and it will be put in my bag.”

The loud ringing of a bell here announced the end of the ten minutes' interval which, according to the rules, is allowed every hour to the lady telegraphists, and, as a little hand was held out to him from a white-cuffed black sleeve, he asked timidly :

“ When shall we see each other again ? ”

Dina thought for a moment and then, raising her blue eyes to his, she said :

“ You know that Marc Javel has invited me on Monday evening. Are n't you going to the ball ? ”

Claudius looked rather sour at this Marc Javel's ball. What an idea ! In the first place, men would not be admitted to it. It was a “ white ” ball for young ladies only, to celebrate his niece's birthday. But, for all that, he begged her not to go, not to mix herself up with these people. She had no idea what these girls in society really were. For instance, this Nadia De-jarine, whose father had just died in such a disreputable way—her conversation was something like a stable-boy's, and it was something disgusting just to hear her and Marc Javel's niece talking together.

“ Dina, I beg of you not to go ; it would make me too miserable.”

His voice trembled in his hurry and emotion. His gestures, always respectful, became tender, supplicating, almost wheedling.

“ But if you ask me in that way, it looks as though you thought you had the right to ! ” she said with a pretty seriousness. And then, stroking his hand with the end of her little fingers, she went on :

“ Very well, then, I won't go to the Javels ; but it will just mean more mystery and more explanations with mamma.”

Until then, there had been no secrets between mother

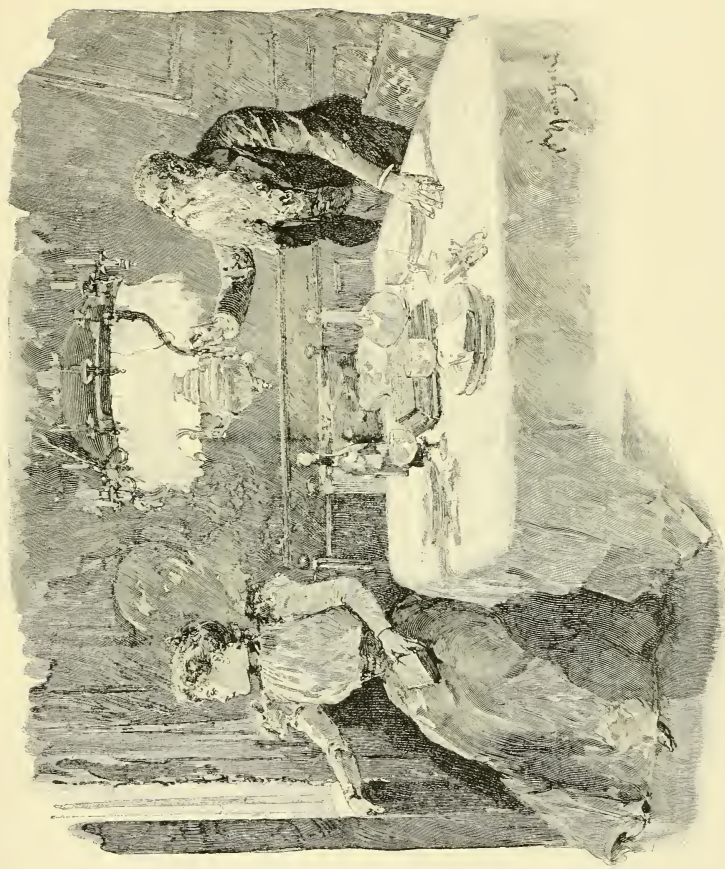
and daughter, nothing but confidences, mostly exchanged in the big bed which had followed them from the Faubourg du Temple to Cherbourg, and from Cherbourg to the room behind the shop at the Wonderful Lamp. But during the last few days these conversations had not been quite as intimate as they had been, and the mother had an idea that the daughter was hiding something from her. If Dina could refuse such a flattering offer of marriage as had been made, it could only be that her heart was already engaged. Well, if this were so, if she distrusted her mother, and if neither of her brothers could do anything with her, there was nothing for it but to go to Tantine, this good Tantine who seemed to have come back from London for the very purpose of getting her old friend out of her difficulty.

Unfortunately, however, when she went to call upon them with this idea in her mind, her father was with her. She was sitting silently at a wide-open window looking out over the landscape of roofs and chimneys and gutters, and he was lighting the big lamp which hung over the table. He turned as she entered and said in his expansive, southern fashion :

“ Ah, good-evening, Mamma Deline ! ”

“ What bad luck not to find her by herself ! ” she said to herself, as she went and sat down beside Genevieve, and then, as though translating her thoughts aloud, she went on : “ Is there no sitting to-night, M. Izoard, or has it finished as soon as this ? ”

“ Yes, there is one, but it is not finished yet. This terrible Dejarine business is giving the Government a lot of trouble. I have just come back to tell my little girl that she will have to dine alone. I must be off again. Our orators, you know, are very particular about having their speeches properly revised.”



“ SHE WAS SITTING SILENTLY AT A WIDE-OPEN WINDOW, AND HE WAS LIGHTING THE BIG LAMP.”

He took one or two steps up and down the room, pulling at his long beard, which with him was a sign of great perplexity. Then he stopped suddenly and said, with a wave of his hand towards Genevieve :

“ Mamma Deline, I am going to entrust her to you. I am going to ask you to relieve me of her for a little. I don't know what 's the matter with her, but just look at her since she has come back from London. She is always in the blues, for one reason or another, sometimes this, sometimes that, as far as her own father knows. To-day, it is this Dejarine business. She is somehow afraid that poor Casta will be compromised. Now, how can that be, when she is n't even in Paris? ”

“ We know nothing about that,” said Genevieve, quickly. “ But it is quite certain that Lupniak is hiding himself somewhere. He is suspected of being one of the principal actors in this fearful affair, and although my dear Sophie seems to have given up politics for her charities and her children's hospitals, I know that she is so enthusiastic about these revolutionary comrades of hers, as she calls them, that I dread seeing her come in at any moment.”

And Madame Eudeline said pityingly :

“ Yes, yes, I can quite understand how that must trouble you.”

But old Izoard screwed up his little coal-black eyes and said :

“ Ah! there 's nothing like a mother to find out what there is in the little noddles of these girls of ours.”

There was an undermeaning in his tone which said : “ I shall be very glad if you will find out what there is in this one's.” And it was thus that his old friend came to understand, for scarcely had he gone downstairs, than she said to Genevieve :

“ Ah, no, mothers don’t know a bit more than anyone else. Now, for instance, I was really coming to ask you——”

She stopped, and Genevieve’s pale face flushed with apprehension. Was it anything about Raymond? Then Madame Eudeline went on :

“ I am worried about my little Dina, and I came to see if you could help me.”

Genevieve shivered. What was Dina to her? It was n’t her name that she expected to hear from Madame Eudeline’s lips.

“ But your daughter’s a mere child ; how can you be troubled about her ? ”

“ But I am, cruelly ! ”

And then Madame Eudeline began to tell her the adventure of her little Cinderella, or, at any rate, as much as she knew of it, and all her fears on her daughter’s account because of her refusal of this excellent offer of marriage.

“ It is quite possible,” said Tantine, gravely, “ that she had very good reasons for refusing it. I have often heard my father say that these Valfons were a very disreputable lot, and the Marqueses, too, for the matter of that. How do you know but that, after all, your little Dina may have been actuated by a very praiseworthy motive ? ”

Genevieve’s voice, usually deep and calm, was vibrating as she said this with an indignation which kindled her eyes and lit up her cheeks. Then she went on suddenly, a trifle confused :

“ But what am I talking about ; it’s no business of mine to run these people down. Still, how can I hesitate between them and your child, good-hearted and innocent as she is ! ”

“ And then you think that if she refuses it is only because her heart is pleading for another ? ”

Madame Eudeline rolled this sentence round her tongue as if it had been a phrase from one of her old romances.

“ In that case she would have told you about it.”

“ Do you think so ? ”

“ Of course I do.”

And the mother, transported with joy, smiled a smile which looked like a reflection of heaven.

“ Ah, Tantine, Tantine, if you only knew how much good you have done me ! It is so wretched to suspect those we love. Just fancy ! my dear little Dina, who has slept beside me since her birth, whose very existence has always seemed a part of mine ! Somehow, now I feel that she is drifting away from me, and I am afraid that she is hiding things from me.”

“ And who has given you the right to think that ? ” asked Tantine, getting up to shut the window, for the evening was coming on.

“ Who has given me the right ? ”

Madame Eudeline took out of one of those unfindable pockets, which women always seem to be sitting upon, two or three unsigned letters like the one that Claudius had received that morning. “ Are you sure,” asked one of them, “ that Dina really goes to her office every day ? With the help of one of the overseers or one of the superintendents nothing is easier than a false entry, either as to the arrival or the leaving of a member of the staff, and if that be so . . . ! ”

Another of these letters reminded Madame Eudeline that several times a week her daughter came home three quarters of an hour or an hour late from the

office. "It would be interesting to know how and where she passed this time."

"It is a shameful thing to say!" murmured the poor woman as Genevieve went to the lamp to look at these infamous things; "but these letters, which you are the first one except myself to see, are spoiling my whole life. Whenever my little girl goes out or comes in, my eyes go to the clock at once. There is n't a fold of her dress, a lock of her hair that I don't notice. When she's asleep I watch over her sleep and her dreams. I get up to search through her clothes, and because I never find anything, instead of comforting me it only troubles me still more, and I think it is simply because she is cleverer than I am."

She got up suddenly and put her arms round Tantine and said :

"My dear, you have so much common sense and my children have always listened to you more than they have to their own mother—help me to get my little Dina back; I've done all I can."

Tantine looked at her with a smile of gentle, mournful irony as she replied :

"Yes, I know that I have plenty of common sense, rather too much. A little more foolishness would have been better for me. However, this time I will be sensible still, and if your daughter wants advice I will give it to her. Only before anything is done"—she handed the anonymous letters back with a gesture of disgust—"burn these villainous things. Don't soil your eyes or your thoughts with them. I can fancy my poor old father receiving such reflections as those on the honour of his daughter. If he did n't die of them himself, he would go and kill someone."

Just then there was a "tra-la-la" on the stairs. The

door opened and, with a glamour of sparkling blue eyes and shining locks of gold, in rushed Dina, who had come to look for her mother and excuse herself for being so late.

Whose fault was it? Master Raymond's, whom she had found at the shop getting ready to dine out and making a toilet which upset the whole house. It was perfectly absurd how much room the making of a masculine toilet took up nowadays, the boot-trees, the trouser-stretchers, and all that sort of nonsense. Antonin's face was a study when he saw these refinements of costume. She was pretty sure that they did n't use them at his workshop.

"Your brother dines out nearly every night, does n't he?" asked Genevieve, who had been forcing herself to smile at this chatter.

A look from Madame Eudeline seemed to say to her daughter, "Don't be so naughty," but Dina, once started, was not easy to stop and she ran on:

"Raymond! I don't think he cares about anything but dining out at these swell restaurants where they give him horse-steaks and things. Oh yes, I have often said to him——"

"I was quite certain," interrupted her mother, "when I saw you come in looking so red that you had been having a quarrel with your brother. I shall have to get Tantine here to scold you. You are not fair to Raymond. When Tonin does n't come home to dinner you never scold him."

Dina seemed almost choked with indignation for the moment. Then she replied quickly:

"Scold Tonin! Good gracious! what for, when his work keeps him at the shop? And even if he does n't dine with us, nothing stops him from coming home and

shutting up the shop for you, or going, as he has gone to-night, to see to the preparations for the installation of His Majesty."

This title, which Dina often applied to her elder brother, made Tantine smile for the moment, and she asked :

" And when is the installation to take place ? "

" Next Sunday, I think for certain," said Madame Eudeline, looking at her daughter. " We 've still a pair of curtains to finish, but we can easily get them done."

But Dina shook her head and said rather absently :

" I 'm not sure that I shall have the time."

" Oh, but you must make the time, you little rascal ! " said Tantine, slipping her arm round her waist, " and if necessary I will come and help you myself. Come now, if I will meet you when you leave the office to-morrow, shall we go home together ? "

Dina looked a little cross at this and said :

" No, I don't think that would do, because I don't know when I shall be coming out. We may have to work overtime——"

" You see, we could have worked the whole night, and have had one of our nice old-fashioned chats like we used to have before I went away to London."

" Oh, you need n't be afraid, Tantine, we shall find lots of opportunities for them," and Dina took her friend's hand caressingly and laid it against her cheek."

The two elder women looked at each other over her head significantly, as much as to say :

" What did I tell you ! "

" Well, yes, it does look as if there was something in it, but never mind, I shall find it out, she will tell me about it."

The night which followed this visit to the Palais Bourbon seemed terribly long to Dina, lying there beside her mother with her face to the wall, forced to keep still in spite of the fire that was running through her veins and the fever that was burning under her closed eyes. She asked herself over and over again what the reply of M. Jacquand would be, and, if it were a refusal, would Claudius have the courage to keep his promise. And what troubled her more than ever was a timid appeal from her mother just before she went to sleep :

“ Are you asleep, Didine ? Won’t you talk a little to me ? ”

Then there was a long sigh and silence. Ah, if only she had been able to throw herself into her mother’s arms and tell her everything ! But no. Claudius desired her to hold her peace, to keep her own counsel and wait—wait—like this !

Her first act on getting up was a fervent prayer to Notre Dame de Fourvières, whose image never left her neck. Then, when she arrived at the office, she hurried into the dressing room where the clerks take off their hats and mantles and put on the long black blouses, in which they work. Her hands trembled as she took hold of her wallet. It was in this little bag that she would find her lover’s answer, whether good or bad. When she went to her work, though the hours were, happily, busy ones, still the same thought tormented her. Want of sleep and the fever of her excitement had made her eyes bright and her cheeks burning, and her fellow clerks and, even, the overseers chaffed her about her colour, and suggested that it might not be unconnected with the tall young man with the light gloves.

As hour after hour went by and each ten minutes' interval came and went without bringing the reply, the poor girl's misery increased, and at last she was almost in despair, in spite of her trust in Notre Dame de Fourvières. At length, when she went out for the last interval before the end of work, she felt the rustle of an envelope under the stuff of her little bag. But there were plenty of prying eyes about, and all she could do was to take the letter out and slip it into her pocket and keep it there with what patience she could until work was over.

At last, however, came the welcome whirring of the bell which announced the change of watch. Then came the hurried dressing, and the stream of hats and mantles and rustling skirts flowing down the staircase meeting another up-coming one composed of the relief. As usual, Dina, slighter and more active than the rest, escaped from the crowd and got out first. There were some new houses being built near and she dived into the solitude of the unmade street, and there, after one or two anxious glances about her, she took the letter out of her pocket, opened it with trembling hands and read :

“ My father has not replied, and he has not come back. I am afraid he never will. I have learned that he is very ill with congestion of the lungs, which at his age leaves no hope of recovery. I am leaving at once, my heart full of him and you, and I hope to be in Lyons before morning in time to embrace him. I would that I could tell him that I love you, and that you are my betrothed before God. Last night they did not read the despatch in which I told him of my love and our engagement sworn on the holy image of Four-

vières. The news would have agitated him and made him worse, and so I cannot be sorry that he knows nothing about it. But would you believe that in that wandering, darkened mind of his ambition still survives alone? During his delirium he spoke of nothing but the Valfons and the Ministry of Marine. This hope will be with him to the end, and you will understand that I could not rob him of it. Pray for my poor old father, as well as for him who signs himself,

“Your faithful and devoted,

“CLAUDIUS JACQUAND.”

Dina read and reread the letter and then, rolling it up and pushing it inside her glove into the hollow of her warm little hand, she sighed, “Ah yes! I will pray for your father, my poor friend, and for you too.” Then, pulling down her veil, she walked with quick firm steps to Saint-Sulpice, her favourite church, where she was wont to find rest and peace for a few minutes after the bustle and rush of the office and the noise of the streets. These visits would have accounted for a good many of the absences on which such an evil construction was put in the anonymous abominations which had made her mother so wretched.

“Let him conceal himself under a porch and watch her coming.”

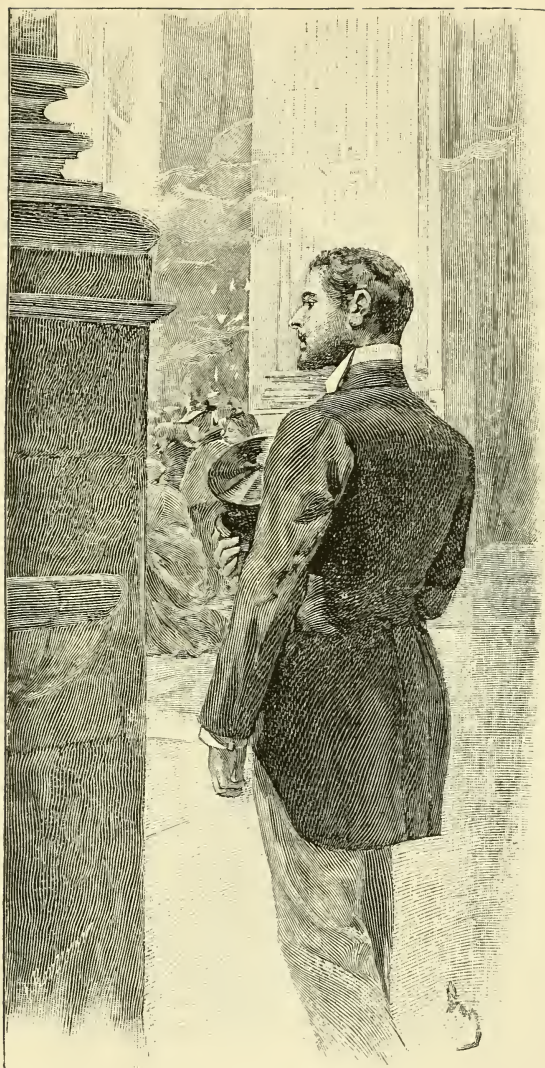
“If Claudius Jacquand wishes to know where the little telegraphist to whom he wishes to give his name goes every day between five and six, after leaving the office, let him stand out of observation under a porch and watch the door of the Central. The writer can guarantee that he will be satisfied.”

How many times had not the unhappy lover promised himself that he would give up ambushes and

espionage, these devices which were so unworthy of his great love ! And yet there he was, dogging Dina's footsteps at a respectful distance along the Rue de Grenelle. Had he, then, lied to her about his father's illness and the journey to Lyons ? No, that was all absolutely true. But even stronger than his filial anxiety was the jealous suspicion which had seized him as he was taking his reply to the office. The idea that Dina would come out in an hour, that perhaps someone might be waiting for her ! The very thought turned into fire the vile poison which for the last two days had been working in his veins. It was two hours still before the train started for Lyons. At least he would go away with some sort of knowledge, and not carry this horrible, torturing doubt to his father's death-bed.

With quick steps, her head erect under her little blue umbrella, shining alternately with sunshine and rain, Dina, looking straight in front of her, walked on towards her destination. Two or three times Jacquand's long strides had taken him involuntarily almost up to her. He stopped and turned across the road and began looking into the window of one of the image shops with which this quarter abounds. A minute or two later, when he looked round, the pretty little figure had vanished. He was then about the middle of the Rue Saint-Sulpice and the fancy took him to go into the church. Perhaps, after all, it might be that she had gone there. Possessed of this idea he went to one of the wicket doors, pushed it open and entered. The next moment the spectacle upon which he was gazing caused him to forget even the motive which had brought him there.

The whole of the vast church, from the choir, glitter-



"HE STOOD AND WATCHED HER THERE, PRAYING AND WEEPING."

ing with gold and lights, down through the vast nave, was bathed in an astral whiteness reflected from muslin dresses and white veils and surplices. The light of the candles, the smell of the incense, the rolling of the organ, and the sweet notes of youthful voices intoxicated him for the time being. During the whole of that day the ceremony of the First Communion had been going on, and these white forms were those of the communicants who were taking their first vows. The organ and the childish voices continued their delicious and mysterious chorus. Gradually the charm wore off Claudius, and he began to look about him. Then suddenly he perceived among other kneeling forms the dainty little figure that he had been seeking. Dina, yes, it was Dina, and as he stood and watched her kneeling there, praying and weeping, he remembered that his farewell request had been that she would pray for his dying father and himself.

It was here that she had come so straight and so quickly while he, filled with his hideous and unworthy suspicions, was following her. Well, he could go now, and her image, shining and pure, should go with him in his heart, a sacred charm against all the powers of evil which sought to separate them.





CHAPTER XIV

THE INSTALLATION

THE installation of "His Majesty," or rather the preparation therefor, was finished early one Sunday morning, and it had been arranged that Raymond was to be taken to his rooms by his mother a little before noon. When they had arrived, and she had introduced him to the varied splendours of the suite, she pointed out the view from the windows of the balcony, the Seine lying like a strip of mirror between the quays, and the wide horizon which the windows commanded, and said to him :

"Now guess where we are. Whose rooms are these? To whom does all this furniture, the piano, these pictures and curtains belong?"

For all answer a cry of joy came from Raymond's lips. He was pleased, delighted, and the apprehensions of a fortnight were set at rest.

Tonin was mounted on a double ladder in the dressing-room putting up some hangings and punctuating with hammer strokes a running conversation with Dina, who was hemming a curtain.

"Tell me, Tonin," she said after a little silence; "you have lived three or four years in London. Did you see any of these Russian revolutionaries there?"

They were doing as all Paris was doing that morning, talking about the Dejarine tragedy.

"Very seldom," he replied, between the taps of his hammer. "I lived outside London, you know, and saw very few people, only those who were employed in the works——"

Then he stopped for a few minutes, too busy with his work to talk, then he began again about the peculiarities of London and suburbs, and told how once or twice he had taken Sophie into Hyde Park—"a regular Bois de Boulogne, only right in the middle of the town"—and there he had seen a few Russian refugees lying about the grass, with the loafers and tramps, within a few yards of the wealth and splendour of Rotten Row. Then he mentioned the name of Lupniak, and she interrupted him suddenly, saying :

"What, Lupniak, the assassin, the man they 're accusing of the General's murder?"

"Yes, but you know he is n't a savage, as they think him. Quite the other way about, a well-educated man, an old officer of artillery, but just one of those implacable theorists who—well, you know—who don't think the same about human life as we—and one day he reproached me with being an egotist."

"What, you an egotist!"

Dina had leapt to her feet in her astonishment at this amazing accusation, but Tonin replied quietly from the top of his ladder :

"Well, yes, and so I am in a sort of a way. You see my idea of happiness may be a trifle narrow, but still when I see you all here, comfortable, and I 've done what I can for you, that 's all I want. I 'm quite happy then. I suppose I 'm something like mamma there used to be when we were little. She did n't

want anything more after she 'd put us all cosily to bed, except to go and sleep herself."

"I don't care about that, Lupniak was wrong, all the same. I am quite sure Sophie would never have called you an egotist."

"Oh! Sophie, she 's a saint; everything that goes wrong in the world makes her suffer. If she had her way, she 'd never go to sleep till she 'd set everything right."

"Oh! yes, I dare say," said Dina, plying her needle furiously; "that 's all very well for her, or saints like her, but I should be quite content to be the sort of egotist that you are, an egotist who has sacrificed himself all his life, who 's been contented to be nothing but a workman, and to learn nothing else, while his elder brother has been educated——"

"Poor Raymond, a lot of good that has done him so far! He who loves us all so much and has injured himself so much for our sakes! No, Dina, you don't know him as he really is; you don't understand him."

Dina looked up with a mocking smile and laughed.

"Oh! yes, I know all about that. I know that I 'm not as good as you and mamma are. That 's why I 'm angry at being kept here, this lovely Sunday morning, when I ought to be at Morangis with Genevieve. And that dear Tantine, she was sewing in here with me the whole of last night. The mere idea that she was working for Raymond was quite enough for her. Look you, Tonin, one of the things I have against Raymond is his indifference to poor Genevieve. The other night at the ball I saw the woman that he likes better."

"No, no, Dina, you must be mistaken; there is n't anybody he likes better, only——"

He finished his nailing and came down from his

ladder and began to explain to her that if Raymond appeared not to care for Genevieve it was only because he thought that, with all his responsibilities for the family, he would never be able to marry her.

“ You talk of sacrifice, my dear girl. Well, he has sacrificed his love, and you ought to know it. It grieves me, this mistrust between you, for I know it will be a great grief to our mother when I have to go away on my military service. And then another thing, what will you do for money ? ”

“ Don’t trouble about that, Tonin, you are not gone yet, and perhaps by the time you do go something fresh will turn up—I think so.”

As these imprudent words slipped from her quite un-awares, Tonin looked at her curiously and said:

“ Why, what do you mean ? Is anyone coming into a fortune ? ”

Now if Dina could only have spoken, if she had not promised !—but as it was, she could only blush and stammer.

“ No, no, I don’t mean that ; I only mean that as soon as Raymond is settled in here——”

But just at the moment Raymond and his mother came in. Then there followed a few exquisite moments of silent inspection, according to programme, and then Madame Eudeline led her son from room to room, repeating her :

“ Now guess in whose rooms you are.”

“ Someone’s who knew all about them from the very first ! ” blurted out Dina in spite of herself.

Then everybody burst out laughing, and the rest of the programme was spoilt as far as the mystery went. But still, there was the wonder of it all. Certainly, Raymond had known, at any rate, about the rooms, but

who could have guessed that they were going to be anything like this ; that Antonin, the workman, could have had such perfect taste ; that he could have arranged such a place as this, with its carpets and curtains, and furniture and decorations, all harmonising so beautifully, even to the piano, which had just come from one of the best houses in Paris. Raymond went to one of the windows, opened it and took a long breath of the fresh morning air and a long look round at the scene below him. Then he turned round and took his brother by the shoulders and said :

“ A fine carpet this that you ’ve put down for me, Tonin ! Ah ! you ’ll see now ; yes, you ’ll see——”

He specified nothing ; but why should he ? They all had the most perfect confidence in him. Very soon he would be President of the association, everybody said he would, and then he would have plenty of opportunities to bring himself out into the light of day. It would be a first step on the political ladder, and no one knew where that might not lead to. Now that he had the tools in his hands, as Tonin had said, everything became possible.

Raymond had come back into the study and was standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece, quite at home already, and looking for all the world as though he were receiving his clients of the possible future. He looked at them all for a moment or two and then, turning to his mother, he said :

“ And now, by way of beginning, my dear Mamma, I wish to announce to you that I am about to receive a visitor here whom I could not receive down yonder at the shop.”

They all looked at him in surprise, and Madame Eudeline said :

“ Who on earth can that be ? ”

“ What, you mean to say you can’t guess ? ” And then in a silence of general stupefaction, he went on :

“ Madame Valfon, wife of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is coming to ask you for the hand of Mam’selle Dina there for her son Wilkie ! Ah ! I see you will hardly believe me. Very well, you will see.”

The poor woman looked down on to the floor as if she were seeking some reply that would not compromise her.

“ Oh ! yes, I know that, of course you told me—but I did n’t know that this lady—at least I did n’t think that it would be so sudden——”

“ But it is not going to take place immediately,” replied Raymond, quickly ; “ I suppose you have explained that to Dina. She is, of course, too young, and Wilkie is not in an established position yet. Only, you see, he is so—well—so infatuated—there is really no other word for it—that he is determined to get his word in first, so that no one shall get before him.”

The expression of Antonin, who now heard of this wonderful marriage for the first time, was absolutely ludicrous in its comic astonishment. Dina, her lips a little white, but otherwise calm, said with a calmness which seemed to show that she had prepared her answer beforehand :

“ I must ask you to thank Madame Valfon for the honour which she wishes to do me, my dear Raymond ; but at the same time I must say that her visit would be quite useless, for I have already made my decision, and it is irrevocable. I have already asked mamma to tell you that.”

“ Yes, I know, she has told me,” said Raymond, his hands and voice both trembling. “ But I have put it

down to a young girl's caprice, which a little reflection will certainly alter. Just think of what this marriage will mean to you, of the world that it will open to you."

Dina threw her little head back proudly, as she replied :

" Yes, it is just that world which I do not want to go into. I have seen it once, and that is enough for me. I have heard its women, and its young girls, talking together in a way fit to turn one's blood cold. Not even at the office, where we have plenty of loose tongues, have I heard anything like the talk between this Nadia, the General's daughter, and her precious friend, Marc Javel's niece."

Raymond took two quick strides towards her and said :

" Then I suppose you are not going there either."

" Certainly not."

" That 's enough, you have done for me," said Raymond, in a low tone, as though he were utterly crushed.

But Dina went on in the same decided tone :

" Well, what would you have ? I was born in the Faubourg du Temple, but I have been brought up in the country. This Parisian society frightens me. In reality, I am certain that Antonin and mamma agree with me. And if Tantine were only here——"

Madame Eudeline shrugged her shoulders gently, and murmured almost inaudibly :

" Yes, yes, if I could only be sure that she was telling me everything."

And Tonin looked at his brother, and murmured :

" Yes, brother—I think so—if I was going to choose a wife—I think I should—at least I should n't take her from the—— "

Raymond turned his back on him and said to his sister :

“ Then that is your last word—neither in six months nor in twelve will you accept my friend Wilkie ; is that so ? ”

“ No. I will never have him.”

“ Take care what you ’re doing, my child,” he said, with a gentleness which they saw was only a cloak for his rising anger. “ Before you come to an absolute decision think, for Heaven’s sake think of what you are really doing.”

“ Well ? ”

He took a long pause, such a pause as a tragedian on the stage might take, before making some tremendous announcement, and then he said in a tone of tragical gravity :

“ You will ruin my chances of the Presidency—that is all ! ”

“ And what does that matter ? ” she said, with a gesture of absolute indifference.

“ You mean that you are laughing at that, just as you are laughing at my friend. But I will have you remember that I have no other presidency at my disposal, while you are no doubt provided for elsewhere. Mam’selle has, I presume, made her choice.”

He strode up and down the little room, too small to give scope to his fury, and then he stopped in the middle, and shaking his fist at the ceiling, exclaimed :

“ Oh, this family, this family ! ”

“ Well, and what has the family done to you, pray ? ” said Dina, giving full scope to her vexation.

“ It has devoured me, fed upon me, eaten me to the bone ! ”

“ Poor family, if it had n’t anything else to live on but you it would be thin enough ! ”

“ Dina ! ” cried her mother, horrified.

But he interrupted her and said, turning to his sister again :

“ Let her go on, I am curious to see what she has to say. Then you consider, Mam’selle, that I have not done enough for you, that I have not given you enough of my flesh and blood ? ”

“ As far as I ’m concerned, I don’t know that I ’ve tasted either your flesh or your blood yet. Of course I can’t speak for the others. All I can say about it is that you seem to have tried all sorts of things and not settled to anything. You wanted to enter the Normal, then to study law, then to go to Cochin-China——”

Antonin, horrified, dumbfounded, stretched out his arms towards her and cried :

“ Dina, Dina, for goodness’ sake——”

But when Mam’selle was once started it took a pretty strong rein to stop her, and the interruptions had only seemed to excite her more and give her new pretexts for saying bitter things.

What would have become of them all without Antonin ? He was the one who had suffered and worked for all of them, who had fed them, lodged them, and clothed them ; he was the real Head of the Family. Raymond only had the title by courtesy.

The moment the word was out, she trembled at the enormity of what she had done and would have taken the word back if she could. If Raymond had opened his arms at that moment she would have thrown herself into them and prayed for forgiveness. But it was too late, the blow had fallen. He, the god, the



OH, THIS FAMILY, THIS FAMILY ! ”

Buddha, the idol of the family, to be insulted like that, and by this little chit of a thing !

“ You could not have said that of yourself, my child ! ” said Raymond, slowly raising his downcast head. “ Someone has put that poisonous thought into your mind ; it could never have come from you.”

Their mother was sobbing. Antonin had fallen on his knees with clasped hands, and was stammering :

“ My friends, my friends—Dina—Dina, you ’re unjust—pardon her, brother, it is not her fault, you know—that temper of hers, it is a disease of hers like papa’s——”

Raymond turned on him like a dog on a rat.

“ Let us alone, you. I have had enough of your hypocrisies and your charities, which only disgust me. Take back your furniture, keep your rooms to yourself, I will go back to my garret in the Rue de Seine.”

“ But he pays for that, too, shop and garret and everything ! ” exclaimed Dina, flinging the words in his face, as it were.

“ Be quiet, Dina, you are naughty, you are wicked ! ” cried Tonin. And then, flinging his arms round his brother, he clasped him close and stammered out :

“ Don’t go, Raymond, don’t go, Raymond, don’t go—I have done nothing—nothing. You know it ’s so nice for us all to be together—it was no credit to me to put you in here, for I knew that we should all get the benefit of it. Just think how delighted mamma was this morning, and now look at her, how sad she is.—Come here, Didine, come here, put your hand into his, and ask him to stop—ah, yes, I thought so, he will stop, don’t say no, Raymond. There, yes—I thought he would.”

There was a long heavy silence, and then Raymond, pacified, but resolute, said :

“ Well, yes, I will stop, but only on one condition ! ”

“ Anything, anything, as long as you ’ll stop ! ”

Raymond thought for a moment, then he said :

“ Whatever has been said here, I am nevertheless the Head of the Family, and I mean to be respected as such. I wish in the first place to have a complete statement of all the money that you have spent on my account.”

“ All the receipts are in that drawer. You will find everything there in order ! ” exclaimed Tonin, joyously.

Raymond went and opened the drawer, ran rapidly through the file of bills, then said as seriously as possible :

“ Before to-morrow you shall have my bill for the amount at three or six months.” And then, to obviate all further discussion, he added: “ I wish it to be so, I insist upon it ! ”

Madame Eudeline, who was drying her eyes, looked up and said cheerfully :

“ Yes, yes, he is right. A bill will look better.”

She had quite recovered her serenity now. She saw her children reunited, and it seemed to her quite regular that Raymond should get out of his brother’s debt by giving him a bill. The only misfortune now was that they could not all spend the rest of the day together. Raymond, naturally, had to look after his election.

“ As for me,” said Tonin, looking at him with eyes like those of a faithful dog, “ I ’ve the rest of the library to arrange and the music to get in order. But that’s nothing ; I shall get Madame Alcide, the house-keeper, to help me. But if you’re going out, leave me

the key. You will find it when you come back, under the door mat."

"But, mind you, don't come back to sleep at the shop by mistake!" laughed Dina, with a wicked little grimace, and Raymond asked her in reply whether she was going to take possession of his room at once.

"I? Oh dear no!" she said. "I'm well satisfied as I am—in the bed with mother behind the screen."

And she said this with such grace and innocence that Madame Eudeline, touched to the heart, felt a good deal easier as to certain doubts which her daughter's resolution with regard to M. Wilkie had raised in her mind.

The chief thing that Raymond wanted now was solitude—an hour or two by himself in which to collect his forces after the shattering blow which had fallen upon him. His pride was cut to the quick. He felt himself smaller and meaner, and he would have given anything to have been able once more to fold himself in that garment of domestic flattery and worship which had been so rudely torn from him. Then, when he found himself alone, he began to long for sympathy, and he thought first of the Izoards, who had gone into the country a couple of days before. There, at least, he would find sympathy and salve for his wounded feelings, and, since Dina had refused to go to Marc Javel's ball, he would be able to settle with the old stenographer some course of action with regard to his father's creditor.

And yet, after all, there was something very strange about this obstinate wrong-headedness of little Dina. What was there behind it all—and what infernal mess

was she going to get him into with Wilkie, with Madame Valfon, with the Minister himself?

All these and many other worries kept hammering in his head while the Orleans train was carrying him to Morangis.

As he knocked at the door of the old hunting lodge a flock of pigeons, settled on the blue roof, flew up, and he heard the old man's voice shouting from the garden :

" Ah, Raymond, I suppose that 's you ! I 'm afraid you 've come to spend the rest of the day with us. Sorry it can't be done." By this time he had opened the door, and he went on in his stormy fashion : " And Genevieve has just gone away to spend the day with some friends in the country and will dine in Paris ; as for me, there 's a grand banquet on to-night which the staff are giving me to celebrate my appointment as Chief of the Reporting Department. However, come in, we can have a talk before I 've to go and dress. It won't take me very long, for Tantine has put everything out ready for me."

There had been a time when Raymond would have hailed the familiar delights of this dear little retreat with unmixed joy, but now they only caused him poignant sorrow. Izoard noticed this very soon, and said :

" Why, what 's the matter, lad ; what has come to you ? "

Raymond tried hard not to give way and said quietly :

" I 've just undergone an operation for cataract and it has given me a good deal of pain. That is what 's the matter with me."

The old man looked at him out of his piercing black eyes, under his thick frowning brows.

“ Cataract, you ! what are you talking about ? ”

“ Yes, M. Izoard, but the cataract was mental, not physical. I have just been shown that my life has been wasted, that in spite of all my pride, all my resolution, the task which my poor father laid upon me when he was dying was too heavy for me—that I am incapable of—of——”

His tears choked him, and the old man said gently:

“ But, my dear boy, what does all this mean ? Who has been telling you all these things ? ”

And then he tried to comfort him, telling him that everyone loved him and looked upon him as the Head of the Family. In the most united families there were always these differences, but they never affected real love or respect. If there was any fault, it was with poor Victor Eudeline's blind infatuation, his worship of Greek and Latin. Of course it would have been better if Raymond had gone into Esprit-Cornat's factory with his brother and had gone to work bravely, and really made himself the support of the family. But if he had not done that it was not his fault, and no one could reproach him with it.

“ Oh, but everyone does, M. Izoard ! ” cried Raymond, drying his tears with an angry gesture. “ And because I feel that I am not equal to my duty, because I have been told horrible things which I hope I may never hear again, I have come to you as to our oldest friend. I have come to ask you to come with me to Marc Javel. You remember that when you used to take me to him before he used to promise me all sorts of things. Well, now I want to go to him again for the same thing. He must find me some employment. It does n't matter where it is, or what it is, as long as it will let me earn something for the support of my family,

and enable me to relieve my brother of a burden which he has borne too long and before his time."

The old man, sitting next to him on the seat that ran round the summer-house, threw his strong arm round his neck, and cried :

" Ah, that is well said ; you are a good lad, a brave boy ! "

And Raymond, softened by his words, murmured :

" Ah, my friend, if you only knew how I have suffered. My mother even does n't believe in me."

It was a lie, but almost an unconscious one, a result of his overstrung emotion.

" Ah well, yes, life is not a very pleasant thing after all," replied the old man ; " there 's lots of trouble for all of us, and you can console yourself with that."

He had pulled his big straw hat, garlanded with leaves in honour of the first Sunday of the spring, down over his eyes, and sat thinking for a minute. Then he jumped up, and began walking with his little short strides up and down in front of Raymond.

" Do you suppose I 've never had any troubles of this sort? Why, look you, can you tell me, for instance, where Genevieve is just now? I promised that I would say nothing about it ; but to you, after what I have just heard, to the new Raymond which you have just shown me, I can say anything. Tantine 's wandering about the woods with Sophie Castagnozoff, who has just come from London. I thought at first that she had come to help this Lupniak, who is supposed to be mixed up with this horrible Dejarine affair. But no, Lupniak is hiding somewhere. He 's not taking any risks, and Sophie has come, would you believe it? to see my daughter, to remind her of an agreement they made together in London, to go to the

English East Indies, to found a children's hospital. You know, when Genevieve was in London she took to her medicine again, so that she could help this friend of hers. You can imagine what I am thinking of all this. It 's very well to have the old philanthropic ideas of '48 about as wide as the Rhone between Beaucaire and Tarascon, but when one has a young daughter, and does n't want to be left alone in one's old age, deprived of everything that is left to you in the world, well, you 'd very much rather see your grandchildren growing up about you. But there, you can't be sure of anything in this world. Here this Sophie came this morning, and during lunch Genevieve tells me that in two months' time they 'll both be on the way to Calcutta. Of course, I could n't make any objection, you see. Tantine is twenty-five and mistress of her own actions. But, as a matter of fact, she has always been that. I have brought her up without religion, but according to very strict moral teaching. She knows that I would never forgive her if she went astray. She has never done it and she never will, but if she has set her heart on this I must let her go. I am proud to see my child faithful to my own ideas and to those of my masters, and to see her go and devote her youth and her beauty to the relief of human suffering. But for all that, you know, I have a big soft heart, and I 'll be hanged if I know how I shall be able to lift my glass to-night to respond to the toast of my colleagues."

As he said this a clock struck in the house next door, and Raymond started and asked whether their old neighbours had come back.

"What, the Mauglas family? You must be joking, they would n't have the impudence. You don't mean

to say that you still believe in the innocence of that fellow ? ”

“ But I ’ve already told you, my dear M. Izoard,” replied Raymond, “ that I met Paul Mauglas at the ball at the Foreign Office that night; that he was quite at home there, a friend of the Minister’s, and stopped to supper and the cotillon.”

“ Well, and what does all that prove ? ” said the old man, flushing up ; “ it only shows that Valfon, Mauglas, and the whole lot of them are in the same basket. That ’s the worst of politics being in dirty hands. They never fall out among themselves except when it suits them to do so. You don’t read the papers evidently. You don’t know that Valfon has just denounced this Mauglas in the open Chamber as a police spy. You can take my word for it, that he won’t be at the next ball at the Foreign Office or supper or the cotillon or the rest of it.”

Then Izoard took a paper out of his pocket and read the Minister’s own words, in which he stated that the whole time General Dejarine had been in Paris Mauglas had been attached to his person and had told him of all the machinations of the revolutionaries against him.

“ Oh, but that is horrible ! ” murmured Raymond. “ So far I have refused to believe it, but after that, of course—what a state the poor devil must be in now ! ”

“ Oh ! you need n’t trouble yourself about that,” said the old man ; “ of course it ’s always an unpleasant thing to lose your job, but when a man has fallen as far as he did, what humiliation could he suffer ? When his pride was dead, what else was there for him in life ? ”

The old stenographer had got this far and was just going to treat Raymond to the oft-told story of his

famous adventure at the Barbes Club in '48, when the clock of Morangis struck, and it was time for him to go and dress for his banquet. So Raymond, feeling that, to a certain extent, he had wasted his day, said good-bye, and took the train back to Paris.

When he got to his journey's end, his first thought was of Madame Valfon, who was "at home" on Sundays. They had not seen each other since that terrible rendezvous in the restaurant; but almost every day since she had written him glowing, passionate letters.

"M'sieu, M'sieu, if you please, where are you going?"

He was already half-way across the ante-chamber when the Suisse called him back to write his name in the book, and told him that Madame was ill and was not receiving to-day.

"Ill! Oh yes, I should think so!"

This came from young Marques, who walked out, pulling on his gloves, white to the lips, and nostrils trembling. He caught Raymond by the arm and walked out with him, saying:

"Ill; perhaps not worse than I am. There's just been a pretty family scene, I can tell you. What a play it would make! 'The Minister's Household.' Good title, eh? But by the way, friend Raymond, what day would it be convenient for my mother to go and see Madame Eudeline to settle that little business we were talking about?"

He stopped as he said this on the curb of the pavement at the corner of the Quai and the Pont de la Concorde, and looked him in the face.

"I'm very sorry," said Raymond, extremely embarrassed by the sudden turn in the conversation, "but do you know I am really afraid that, after all, we should be giving Madame Valfon a useless journey.

I told you that my sister was rather uncertain about it, and now this uncertainty of hers, which has nothing to do with you personally or with anyone else, has become quite an obstinate resistance, and nothing but patience will be of any use to overcome it."

Wilkie's mean little face contracted with anger to more than usually viperish proportions, as he replied in a grating tone :

"Take care, my friend, I mean to go through with this, whatever it costs !"

He stopped, and then went on abruptly :

"Will you come with me to the Avenue d'Antin ?"

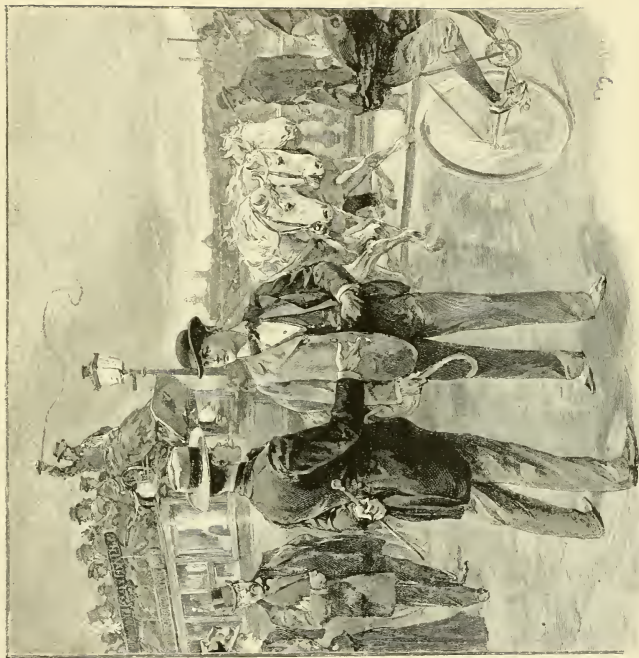
"No, thanks, I'm dining on this side of the road to-night."

"That's a pity. We should have gone to Gastine's, and I would have shown you my last challenge, one that is going to Claudius Jacquand to tell him that within eight days he'll have a bullet in the groin—one of those wounds which one does n't recover from."

"What !" murmured Raymond, hardly understanding what he heard. "Claudius Jacquand—a ball in the groin ?"

"You don't know him, I suppose," grinned Wilkie. "Well, you will know him sometime, and as for you, my dear President, I suppose you feel quite sure of your election ? For my own part, I'm beginning to have my doubts about it. Ta-ta !"

He disappeared in the crowd, and Raymond walked away to his restaurant, wondering what on earth it could all be about. What had Claudius Jacquand to do with it ? He had n't even been Dina's esquire, for she was dancing with Wilkie. What if he were to send a note to Madame Valfon ? She would probably tell him at once.



"HE STOPPED ON THE CURB OF THE PAVEMENT AS HE SAID THIS."

When he came to his restaurant he decided to write the letter there, and on the table at which he sat he found an illustrated paper containing photographs of the murdered General and his supposed assassin. He recognized the crooked eyes, the Calmuck nose, and the wild-beast mouth of Lupniak, and now he knew whose face it was that had flitted past the window of the private dining-room of the restaurant. The recognition made his hand tremble somewhat as he wrote his note to Madame Valfon, and added the address and a suggestion for a new rendezvous.

After dinner, he went to the smoking-room of the association to see if Wilkie really had begun his counter-campaign against him. He found everybody talking about Mauglas and his adventures, and he immediately began to brag about knowing him and aired the theories which he had derived from him. It would have been much better for him to have held his tongue, for there were several old members of the committee there who would, of course, be electors for the Presidency, and, as they were mostly sons of notaries and advocates, these theories were very little to their liking.

Towards ten o'clock, he felt a sudden sense of fatigue come over him. The day had been a long, weary one for him, and he decided to go to bed. By instinct he took the turning into the Rue de Seine, and it was only at the corner of the Boulevard that he saw his mother's shop shut up and thought of his new abode. He turned and walked quickly to it, went in, counted his four flights of stairs very carefully, and found his key in the place agreed upon. His key, his room—how nice that sounded ! How deep-set, after all, are those sentiments of liberty, of individuality, to which that satisfaction of his was due ! He went straight in, finding his way

without a light, as if he had lived there twenty years. When he entered the room and while he was striking a match, he heard a faint rustling coming from the corner of the window as if it had been made by a tall shadow which he saw outlined there by the moonlight.

“Who is there?” he said aloud, walking towards the motionless form, which all at once moved out towards him murmuring in a vague and dreamy voice :

“It is I,—Genevieve.”





CHAPTER XV

MONEY AND ALL

HE seemed to have been dreaming that he was in a steamer bound for the Indies, that had reached some port in bad weather, for the wind was heavy and the waves high. Everybody had been hurrying off the ship and he was left alone, snuggling luxuriously between the sheets of his berth, out of which he did n't seem able to turn. And then, as his eyes opened, he saw Genevieve, fully dressed, moving about him and heard her voice asking him to get up. Then she seemed to show him the empty saloons and the vacant companion-way, and at last, vexed with his laziness, go out of the cabin and slam the door behind her.

It was this noise, in reality the banging of an unfastened window, which really woke Raymond the following morning, and for some time his drowsy eyes wandered about the room, trying to familiarise themselves with the strange objects about him. Genevieve was really there with her little mantle and violet-trimmed hat on, moving about with quick, soft steps, inaudible in the noise of the wind and rain outside. At last, she went to a handsome cabinet which she closed very carefully, then brought the key and laid it on a little table.

"Are you going already, and in such weather?"

Yes, unfortunately, she had to, because her father's new position at the Palais-Bourbon compelled him to remain there all night and he only got to Morangis to lunch, so, of course, it was necessary that she should be there when he reached home.

"Very well, then—and the next time?"

She lifted her veil, bent her pretty, flushed face near to his and said in a whisper:

"To-night at the same time as yesterday, if you like. I was here a long time before you came. If you are going to work I will work near you, with you—you remember how we used to do our lessons at Morangis? What are you working at now? Your doctor's degree, or that book that you were telling me about? It must be so nice to be able to write; one can do so much good with a book."

"And you can make money, too, but meanwhile I have to live and provide for them as well."

She laid her lips on his two eyelids before she answered:

"Is that not just what I told you, my Raymond? Now listen. In the drawer of the cabinet yonder there are thirty thousand francs, the remainder of my fortune which I have n't to account for to anybody. There is the key. It is more than you will want to settle with your brother and keep the others until your novel is finished."

Oh, no, no, he could n't do that; it was quite impossible! Why did she talk to him about this money again? How could she believe he had fallen as low as that?

"Those are only words, my Raymond, and they don't mean anything. If I were your wife you

would n't see anything wrong in taking my thirty thousand francs, would you ? ”

“ Oh, yes, in that case, naturally. ”

“ Well, then, as you know that you have n't the right, that you are not free to marry yet with the family depending upon you—you know you told me that one day and I have n't forgotten it——”

“ And then !——”

She put her two arms round his neck and leaned her head against his golden curls and said tenderly, but gravely :

“ I don't regret a single thing that I have done, and I will never reproach you with a tear. What has happened had to happen and I shall never repent of it—at least, not on one condition, and that is that you shall treat me as your wife, that I shall have all the rights and all the duties of a wife, and that there shall be just the same confidence and trust between us as there ought to be between a man and a woman who love each other, and who have given themselves to each other, and for whom everything ought to be in common, money and all. ”

She spoke so straightly, so frankly, and withal so gently that he could do nothing but temporise.

“ But I thought—did you not tell me that you meant this thirty thousand francs for Sophie's orphanages ? ”

She did n't deny it. Yes, if she had gone to India with Sophie that is how she would have spent them. Then Raymond looked at her with wonder in his eyes and said :

“ But who stopped your going ? ”

“ Why, you did, you bad boy. Can you have any doubt about that ? When I came back yesterday afternoon from my walk with Sophie, talking about our

great journey, and found poor papa in such a terrible state about your visit and full of your troubles and despair—ah, my poor boy, that upset all my resolutions in a moment, and Sophie guessed it instantly, for she said to me, ‘I’ll bet that I can tell you where you’ll go to-night.’ I could have said just the same to her, for I was certain that she was going to Paris to see her friend Lupniak, who I’m sure is here, though he’s hiding so closely, and Sophie dare n’t even tell me where he is, because—because——”

She hesitated for a moment, and his lips took on an expression of something like disgust under his blond moustache.

“Because of me, I suppose? She has always seemed to dislike me, to distrust me. Now with Antonin——”

“Well, what is that? You are too handsome for her, too much admired. She takes to Tonin out of pity, she likes him for all he has n’t got, but that does n’t stop her being the best girl in the world. What do you think she said to me last night at the station just as I was coming away? ‘You know, Tantine, that I have made my peace with my people at Odessa. The harvest is good, and I am rich, very rich. But still I shall always want you to help me in my work, only—get rid of your money.’”

“And remember,” said Raymond, with a tender laugh, “that I say exactly the same thing to you. It is you, nothing but you, that I want.”

As soon as he was alone he rose and dressed slowly. His head was heavy and his hands trembling in the intoxication of this happiness which had so suddenly come upon him. He seemed to have lost himself in a whirl of varied sensations, but the chief of them was an infinite gratitude to this adorable girl who

sacrificed all her pride and fears just because she had seen him unhappy. And yet, at the same time, there was something very different mingled with this gratitude. There was the unconquerable remorse for having deceived this poor loving Tantine, for making her believe that his family had turned upon him and treated him as a fraud and a pariah, for swearing eternal love to her when he had already given himself to another, to this woman from whom he had just received two letters this very morning. No, no, that must be done with, at any cost. To see her again would be criminal, and the moment that Madame Alcide made her appearance she received, once for all, an absolute order not to admit any other woman to his rooms, or even to allow any to come up-stairs for him, save the young lady who had just gone out.

This Madame Alcide, the housekeeper, as usual with her kind, promptly commenced a long gossip with her new tenant. Her husband, Alcide Scelos, was a carver in metals and a chorus-singer at the theatres. But in the time of the Commune he had been Director of the National Theatre and Comic Opera, and had also commanded the artillery during the last eight days. He finally was sent to New Caledonia after having been permitted to marry a young burnisher of twenty who was already the mother of a little girl whom he adored.

After ten years he had been amnestied, and, naturally, he was no small hero in the eyes of his still adoring wife, and she pointed him out, very proudly wheeling a child's carriage on the pavement under the balcony. It seemed a curious employment for a big fellow who had a face like a Tartar warrior garnished with long, thick, ruddy moustaches and a scar which crossed his features from brow to chin. She pointed out that he

was n't doing any work just now. It was not an easy thing to find a post that was worthy of the man who had been Director of the National Theatre of the Commune, and had commanded the artillery in the last battle, and she was afraid that he would never get suitable employment without the help of the good M. Antonin.

"Ah, yes, of course you know my brother," said Raymond, irritably, expecting nothing less than another of the eternal homilies on the goodness and generosity of his brother and his superiority to himself. Madame Alcide, however, contented herself with praising his goodness, not only in having proposed her husband for an overseer's berth in Esprit-Cornat's works, but also in suggesting that he should send their sick child to a famous doctor who was attending one of his friends.

"And," said Madame Alcide, running on from one subject to another, "Madame, too, is very fond of your brother."

"Madame who?" asked Raymond, looking up in surprise.

"Why, your young lady, M. Raymond; the pretty young lady who has just gone out. I have seen her come here two or three times with your brother, looking after the things for you, and that is why I let her go in last night. I hope I did n't do wrong?"

"Oh, no, no, certainly not—quite the contrary; and please remember that, when I am not here, no one else but this lady has the right to take the key and go into my rooms." But for all that, he did not say this without a little pang of jealousy caused by the thought that Tonin had spent hours alone with Genevieve in his rooms.

Whether or not it was the sensation of being there in his own place with thirty thousand francs at his disposal, or whether it was the sense of responsibility with which this great and earnest affection which had just come into his life inspired him, it was certain that this morning Raymond felt a curious desire to assert himself by some action that was really worthy of a man, to free himself from the childish and trifling surroundings which had so far encumbered his life. All of a sudden, for instance, the Presidency of the association appeared to be a silly, useless thing. He remembered now that all those who had cut the greatest figures and made the most noise in the association had turned out failures the moment they had come into contact with the realities of life.

No, this childish Presidency was not worth having. It was not worth all the trouble and time that he would have to spend in meeting the underhand attacks of the perfidious Wilkie.

As soon as he had come to this very sensible conclusion, he went straight to the Rue des Écoles, walked into M. Alexis's office, and there wrote out three copies of a declaration informing his good friends and comrades of the association that he had unexpectedly found himself compelled to withdraw his candidacy for the Presidency, for purely private reasons. He fastened one copy to the mirror in the smoking-room, put one in the gymnasium and one in the library, and went away laughing at the astonishment of Wilkie when he would come to begin his work of destruction and find that there was nothing to destroy.

This matter settled, he went to see his mother, whom he knew he would find alone at this hour. Without exactly confessing it to himself, he wanted in some way

to get even with her for having been present at the humiliating scene of the previous day, and for being content just to go on crying, instead of making Dina hold her tongue. From the way he went into the shop where Madame Eudeline was sitting behind her counter, the poor old lady jumped at the conclusion that he was still angry. She quickly closed *The Memoirs of Alexander Andrienne*, marking her place with her spectacles, and said :

“ Have you come to lunch, Raymond ? ”

No, he had n't come to lunch. He had just come to say good-morning and to write out a few promissory notes for his brother. She timidly pushed the pen and ink towards him, saying :

“ But why do you want to do it so soon ? You know very well that Tonin is not in want of money, and I 'm sure he 's in no hurry.”

“ No, but I am, Mamma,” he said with a grand air.

It was wonderful to see the gravity with which he wrote out these visionary securities of his at three, six, and nine months, under the admiring eyes of Madame Eudeline.

When he had finished and had carefully folded up the bills and put them into his pocket-book, he said :

“ And now, my dear Mother, I want you to show me your books.”

She stared at him in alarm.

“ Yes, your books, the business ones, I mean. I wish to know how much you spend, you and Dina, out of the money which my brother gives you to live on.”

There were two of these books in the little case under the counter. The ledger in which Tonin wrote down the number of lamps which came and went out, which were manufactured and sold each week. The other

was the housekeeping book, just as carefully kept as the other, and here the old lady put down her daily expenses. Raymond had never looked into it before, but when he had run through the first two or three pages he shut it up, blushing and confused, for these were the items which kept on recurring : " Tramway, thirty centimes. Wool for mending, twenty centimes. Coals, fifteen centimes. Raymond, twenty francs. Raymond, forty francs."

" I 'm afraid you think we spend a great deal," said Madame Eudeline gently, misunderstanding his gesture. " But I dare say we could economise a little."

He made a motion of protest. Why should they reduce their expenses, seeing that he was going to pay for them ?

Madame Eudeline looked at him with pain in her eyes.

" But, surely, you 're not going to charge yourself with us yet ! With his share of the profits of the works Antonin can manage very nicely now."

As usual, without specifying anything, for as a matter of fact he did n't know yet what he was going to do, he replied with dignity :

" That is a matter between my brother and myself ; I must ask you not to interfere with it. I can assure you, however, that the day when I charge myself with your support, neither you nor Dina will have anything to complain of."

" Then you are not vexed with little Didine," said Madame Eudeline, sitting down again. " You know she is n't really naughty, there 's no harm in her, but she is violent, passionate, and I am sorry to say that for some time past I have seen a change in her which gives me a great deal of trouble. She seems sad

and preoccupied. There is some mystery about her which none of us can understand, not even Tantine herself. Now, if you would only take her in hand, I am sure that she would confide in you."

Raymond smiled a trifle bitterly and said :

"No, thanks ; I've brushed up against that thorn-bush once and the scratches are still smarting. She's got me into trouble with Marques ; she has obliged me to go and ask a favour from Marc Javel which she could have got very easily for me, and altogether I have had about enough of her. Please don't ask me to have anything more to do with her. All I want to do is just to prove to her that I am not merely an honorary Head of the Family. If I hear any more about that I shall drop it. Tell Tonin to come for his bills to-morrow. I shall be at home all day."

"Then we sha'n't see you to-morrow?"

"Oh no, I shall stop at home. I must work."

He kissed her, stroked the grey folds of her hair and left her with wet eyes and smiling lips.

As a matter of fact, he did not go out the next day, although he hardly did any work. In the morning, just when Genevieve was starting for Morangis, there was a little bit of a scene—nothing to speak of, of course, only just what might happen to anyone after two days of housekeeping. They were talking about work and about the future. Raymond was bewildering her with a string of marvellous projects.

"Ah! if it only did n't take so long, I think I should be tempted to go in for medicine."

"Well, if you did, I should be able to help you, for I was reading with Sophie the whole of the year that I was in London. In fact, I was working beside her every day."

Then Raymond said, as though he were thinking aloud :

“ Ah, yes, of course you were, but what did you go to London for ? ”

And she, candid as ever, replied :

“ I went to try and forget you, you bad boy, and you know very well that I did. While I was in Paris I was too near to you.”

“ And after all, you could n't,” he said, with a coaxing laugh. “ Come now, confess that you could n't.”

“ Well, was n't my coming back a confession of that ? —and after all, I only came to find that you were in love with somebody else.”

He tried to deny it. That is the only idea that men have of discretion.

“ Who has told you that ? ”

“ Why, you did yourself. Don't you remember your fine lady singer, the one that you wanted rooms in town and a piano for ? ”

He felt himself blushing and murmured :

“ Oh, that 's all over now.”

Her lips moved in a mirthless smile and she looked down into the depths of his eyes and said :

“ Why, all over ? ”

“ Oh, Tantine, how can you say such a thing ! ” he said with an outburst of sincerity.

She bent down over him and said softly :

“ If you wish to convince me, there is a very easy way for you to do it.”

Then as she was leaving she pointed to the cabinet which contained the thirty thousand francs that he still obstinately refused to touch.

Hardly was this little dialogue ended, than a new and

strange construction was put upon it by the arrival of a telegram from Madame Valfon, telling Raymond that she would be with him between ten and twelve that day.

Notwithstanding the orders which he had given overnight and the pressing terms of the message, Raymond kept his head and, as soon as Genevieve had gone, he called Madame Alcide and said to her :

"Between ten and twelve o'clock a lady will come here to see me, somewhat stout, very well dressed and heavily veiled. You must not let her come up on any account."

"You can be quite easy about that, M. Raymond," replied the former Directress of the Opera Comique. "When he kept the Salle Favart, I often had to protect M. Alcide's rooms from these women. Not one of them ever got in !"

And then he thought of the motion of that lovely arm with its eighteen-button glove, with which she would stop her carriage, and, in spite of himself, Madame Alcide's tenant felt a trifle perturbed.

It was a damp, raw day with low, misty clouds drifting now and then over the housetops, just the very day for concentrating one's thoughts and doing some good hard work, especially in a charming little study like this, and Raymond would really have been glad to do some, only the idea that ten o'clock was coming near, and that, perhaps in a few minutes, Madame Valfon's carriage might be at the door, made it impossible for him to sit still.

He was dressed in his working suit of white flannel and blue smoking-cap, and in one of his fits of restlessness he went out on to the balcony and took a look up and down the Boulevard to right and left. Pres-

ently a hired carriage came rattling along the street from the direction of Cluny and started his heart beating for five minutes. She was coming, there was no doubt of that. As a matter of fact, the carriage did stop at the door, but it was Antonin who got out, ran into the house and almost immediately came out again, followed by M. Alcide, carrying his child, a little white bundle, on his shoulder. The figure of a woman in a jersey surmounted by a hat trimmed with flaming flowers leaned out towards the little invalid; Raymond at once recognised Sophie Castagnozoff, no doubt the famous doctor of whom Madame Alcide had been talking.

Immediately he thought of how Genevieve's friend distrusted him, how she was even now hiding her presence in Paris from him, as though she feared that he would denounce her. On the other hand, Antonin, the confidant of all her secrets, knew where to find her at any moment. What was the reason of this injustice, and what superiority could an intelligent and well-educated girl like Sophie find in this ignorant, stammering workman? Then once more he felt that chill at his heart, that pricking of jealousy which so often came to him now, when he was thinking of his younger brother.

There was a regular open-air consultation going on down below. Madame Alcide, who had come out to rejoin her husband, was listening with all her eyes and ears to the utterances of the oracle. Then in a few moments the two men got into the carriage, which drove away in the direction of the Halle aux Vins, and the housekeeper retired to her little box sending kisses and curtsies after them. Evidently Sophie thought it more convenient to take her little patient home with

her in order to examine it. But what an extraordinary fatuity it was for her to trust so entirely to these common people, these gossips of the doorways, and even to admit them to her own dwelling, and yet at the same time keep him, Raymond, at a distance ! He was standing leaning up against a corner of the window thinking rather bitterly about this, when suddenly a deep, resonant chord rang out from the piano behind him like the echo of an avalanche, and then came the ringing tones of a superb contralto :

“ Ah ! si la mort que rien ne saurait apaiser ! . . . ”

He turned to the window and looked in terrified. Madame Valfon was seated at the piano, the thick waves of her ruddy hair glowing against a dress of white serge, which gave her the figure of a woman of thirty. Her gloves, and a dainty parasol, with a jewelled handle, were littered in charming disorder over the books and papers on his work-table. Without dropping a note or ceasing to sing the Minister's wife turned herself round, supple and caressing, and offered Raymond her half-opened lips.

After what he had just sworn to Genevieve, after this utter and generous sacrifice which she had made of herself, treason would be more odious than ever. But how was he to escape from it gracefully ?

“ What ! is it you ? How did you enter ? ” he stammered in the embarrassment of his surprise.

“ Oh, I left the carriage at the corner of the Boulevard and the Quai. There was no one below ; you told me that it was on the fourth floor, so I came up.”

And then she added, looking round with true feminine curiosity :

“ Is n't it delightful, this little nest of yours ? ”

Then of course he had to show her everything, and the rooms interested her immensely. Then forthwith she began to suggest improvements and embellishments. An awning on the balcony, and so on, just as though the whole place had been taken on her account. The embarrassment of her dear handsome boy was very apparent to her, but she put it down to an excess of delicacy. He was too poor for this increase of expenditure and he was too proud to accept it from her. Then she set herself to reassure him. No, nothing should be changed at all. She found everything charming.

Raymond was thinking, as she was, of their first rendezvous down yonder on the Boulevard Beaumarchais ; but before he had time to answer her there was a loud ring at the bell, and he heard Tonin's voice calling on the landing :

“ Open the door, it 's me.”

“ Don't be afraid, it 's only my brother,” said Raymond to Madame Valfon, who had turned white with fear. “ I had forgotten he was coming.”

“ Ah, yes, this unfortunate fellow that you were telling me about ! ” she murmured, remembering the harrowing story that he had told her of this brother who had gone to the dogs and taken to drink and all the rest of it. And then, full of pity and admiration for Raymond, she went on :

“ Poor dear, perhaps you had better go and speak to him ; do go, please.”

He hesitated at leaving her in this error, but his pride carried him away. In the end, his younger brother might get too much into the habit of walking over him, and he had no objection to giving him a lesson to-day, and showing him that all women were

not like Sophie Castagnozoff, that they did n't all prefer a workman to a refined and well educated man.

" You 'll have to come back some other time, Tonin," he said, " I can't ask you to come in just now, because I have someone with me."

But there was no need for Raymond to emphasise the someone, for Tonin at once replied :

" Very well, Raymond, I 'll come back."

But as he was turning to go away, the other stopped him and said :

" Wait a minute. Just come in here ; I've something to show you."

They went into the study, which was now empty, and nothing could be more pathetic than the timid way in which Tonin stepped with his heavy boots over the carpet and about the furniture which he had chosen and paid for, but which were for him transfigured by the thought that it was there that his brother lived and worked.

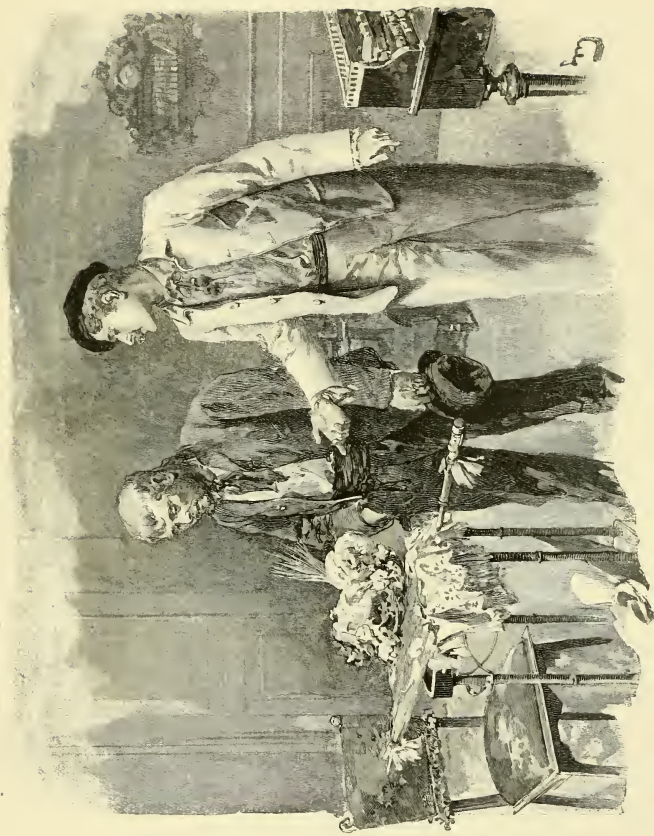
" Look at that, my boy ! " said Raymond in a low tone ; " have you ever seen anything more *chic* than that ? "

As he was n't able to show him his fine lady, he wanted his brother to admire the eighteen-button gloves and parasol with its gold handle, chased and set with emeralds. It was just these that he liked best about Madame Valfon, her luxury, her jewels, and her costly dresses, and believing that his brother admired such things too, his gesture seemed to say to him :

" There, look at that, and burst with envy ! "

When he had had a good look at them, Antonin, full of admiration, exclaimed in his feeble, stammering voice :

" Ah, you lucky dog—and—if—if the lady is young



"HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANYTHING MORE CHIC THAN THAT?"

too, and if she—a well, you know, if that 's all right, she—she must be a dainty morsel.”

Then Raymond, shrugging his shoulders with something like disgust, went to the cabinet, and took out his three promissory notes, all drawn in perfect form.

“ Here are my notes in payment for the furniture. We will settle for the rest later on,” he said, handing them to Antonin. “ And now I must ask you to go, please ; I 'm busy.”

Tonin stood, dumbfounded, looking from his brother to the bills which were fluttering in his trembling hand. He could hardly trust himself to speak, for he felt that the tears were very near his eyes.

“ No, no, Raymond—please—please keep these things, I don't want them—I 'm afraid you 're vexed with me.”

Raymond drew himself up with an unpleasant smile of satisfaction on his lips and said haughtily :

“ That will do. You gave me a lesson the other day that I shall not forget in a hurry.”

“ A lesson—I gave you a lesson—oh ! ”

His voice was so tender and the tears in his eyes seemed to ask pardon so piteously that Raymond was softened, and said :

“ That 's all right, old man ; I owe you this money. I am paying you in bills ; but if I chose, you know——”

He put his hand down into the drawer which held the thirty thousand francs, pulled out a bundle of notes and, as Tonin stared at them in amazement, said lightly :

“ An advance from my publishers for the book that I am writing. So you see that it is n't any inconvenience to me.”

“ Ah, wonderful ! ” stammered Tonin, in blind wor-

ship of anything connected with literature. Then he turned on his big boots and went away radiant and filled with the most profound respect for this wonderful big brother of his.

In the next room Madame Valfon was putting together what Raymond had told her and the little she had been able to hear of the conversation, and with the sentimentality of her age, she reconstructed the scene between the two brothers according to her own idea. Then when Raymond came in she would throw her arms round him and murmur tenderly :

“ Ah ! my dear one, how bravely you bear this cross of yours, this heavy burden of your family. Come, dearest, let me weep with you, let me console you ! ”

When he returned to the room Madame Valfon was still seated at the piano, allowing her fingers to wander up and down the keys and half musing, half thinking aloud as she did so.

“ Ah ! if I only had your talent, I would like to relate my own romance too ! How it would console me to tell all the story of my suffering with this miserable Valfon, this son of a clown who is a hundred more times of a clown than his father ! If I could only show him as he is in his public life, standing there in the tribune before the Chamber with his hand on his heart vapouring about Country, Honour, Patriotism, Conscience, the Republic—words which he dishonours by speaking, and which he chews between his teeth as he does the ends of his cigars—and then to show the same man at home, in his own family ! Believing in nothing, scoffing, cynical, careless of everything but his own pleasures and his own interests. If I could only show him raging over the loss of the Jacquand fortune which he hoped Florence’s marriage would bring under his control ! ”

Then she stopped, but the piano went on as though continuing her railing in its own language. And Raymond, standing beside her, put his arm round her and said :

“ Yes, but how was it that marriage was broken off ? ”

She turned round and stared at him, her eyes wide open. What ! he did n't know about this adventure with Claudius, this Claudius Jacquand who had gone mad with love for his own sister Dina, ever since the night of the minuet ?

“ No ; she 's never said a word to me about it, nor my mother, nor anybody else. Oh, nonsense ! Surely that 's too much of a good thing. Ah, how you must have cursed me for all that I have made you suffer without knowing it ! ”

“ Curse you, my dear boy,” she said, throwing one arm around him ; “ you who are all that I have in the world ! You, who are the very breath of my life ! How can one curse one's own creator, for it is you who have made me live—*ay, mi alma !* ”

French was not enough for her, and so she went back to her mother tongue in order to find words to interpret her passion.

“ Yes, yes, there 's too much mystery altogether about this life of ours,” he murmured. “ It was only necessary for this chit of a Dina to go, quite by accident, one night to your house in order to render everything that ought to happen impossible. Then this Dejarine goes and gets himself killed in the next room and even that is not enough. This man Lupniak, the one who is supposed to be the murderer, just fancy, I know him. I could give evidence that would convict him, and it 's my duty to do so. I saw him just a moment after he

had struck the blow, gliding past the window. Our eyes met, and we recognised each other ; only you see if I were to go and give evidence I should have to say what I was doing there at the time and who was there with me."

" Ah, *Madre mia !* " Madame Valfon gasped through her white lips, and then Raymond went on to reassure her.

" But then it is, of course, impossible for me to speak. In the first place, you are to be considered, and then this Lupniak is not merely a vulgar murderer ; he is a friend of that extraordinary creature, Sophie Castagnozoff, that I was telling you about. You know she is going out to India to found children's hospitals, as she did in London, and I am quite sure that she has only put off going in order to help this fellow to escape—and she is another who makes it quite impossible for me to speak."

In the silence which followed twelve o'clock struck, and Madame Valfon jumped up, and then, as though she were unable to tear herself away, she took hold of her young lover's hand, white and soft and warm as any woman's, and pressed it between hers, looking at him fondly out of her half-closed eyes.

" Do you know what I 'm thinking about ? " she sighed. " When you don't love me any longer, and I have Florence married, and there is no more hope or joy left for me in the world, perhaps this Sophie, this friend of yours, will take me as a nurse in one of her hospitals. I have just been reading about her work, it is as touching as the *Imitation* of 'Thomas à Kempis itself.' "



CHAPTER XVI

JOURNALIST AND POLICE-AGENT

IN his big office on the Quai d'Orsay where, although the spring was getting on, the wood fire was burning brightly in the grate, the Minister for Foreign Affairs was sitting late on the evening of the same day chewing the end of an extinguished cigar and twisting his little white moustache with nervous fingers.

"Well, Governor, how are things going at the Chamber? Has the Ministry gone yet?"

The Minister did not reply to this remark of M. Wilkie's, who had just burst unceremoniously into the room. In order to cover his silence, he took the letters which were lying on his desk waiting for his signature, read them over very carefully, and then proceeded to sign them deliberately. Wilkie took a turn or two up and down the room, and then exclaimed again:

"Confound it, it's the dinner at the English Embassy to-night, and I can't go."

"Why not?" asked the Minister in a dry tone, without turning his head.

"Because I'm going to fight to-morrow, and I have to go and find seconds, and have some practice with Ayat and Gastine."

"I hope you don't forget that you are a member of

my household. You know I am standing very well with the press just now, and I don't want any scandals."

Wilkie began at once to explain that he had promised his sister to obtain her redress for the slight that had been put upon her, and as he had not been able to do so by mild means, he had been compelled to take stronger measures.

"Well, and with whom are you going to fight?"

"Why, with Claudius, of course; who else? He is the fellow who has upset the whole apple-cart, as far as I am concerned. Fortunately, he's coming back from Lyons. His father's better."

"Well, and do you think yourself a match for this big Lyonnais," muttered Valfon, still chewing at his cigar; "do you think you'll get him to come out?"

"Oh, there's no fear of that. There's plenty of fight in these southerners. However, we'll see."

The door opened and a footman came in.

"The person is here, Monsieur le Ministre."

Valfon made a sign to his step-son, who vanished through one door as the individual announced entered by another, in obedience to Valfon's directions to the footman to admit him, but not to light the gas.

In the semi-darkness the figure of a big man in a velvet coat carrying a soft hat in his hand came forward.

"Well, Mauglas, any news?" said Valfon, without getting up.

The spy came a step or so nearer and said:

"According to your orders, I followed Madame to the cab stand in the Rue de Bourgogne, and there she took a cab and drove along the quays to the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Germain. There she alighted and

went to the house where young Raymond Eudeline has been living for the last few days. His rooms are on the fourth floor, and in them Madame passed the two hours of her absence. You did not desire me to learn anything further, but I found that the concierge is an old official of the Commune, a most amusing fellow, and very easily drawn——”

“Thank you, I know all that I want to know,” murmured Valfon.

After a few moments of silence Mauglas began again, with a little servility in his tone.

“You promised to say something for me to the Russian Ambassador. I think that that would be only just after the brutal way in which you abused me in the Chamber.”

“I have done so, Mauglas, but the Ambassador seemed to be a bit chilly about it. He seems to think that there is n’t any further need for your services as a spy. He ’s sorry, because he found you clever, and some of your reports he admired very much.”

“Nice sort of people these, to risk your skin for,” muttered Mauglas, crumpling his hat up in his hands.

“Well, man, you are paid for it, are n’t you?” sneered Valfon. “And besides, there ’s nothing to hinder you taking other employment. At any rate, there ’s a diplomatic dinner on to-night. Would you like me to speak once more to M. Karamanonn?”

“You would oblige me very greatly if you would, Monsieur le Ministre,” replied Mauglas, as he went out with a brief, curt nod.

As soon as he was left alone, Valfon took up his hat and the big official portfolio that lay on his table and went out of the door that Marques had left by, which led into the private apartments. With a refinement

of cruelty, Valfon had determined to expose his wife's misconduct to her own daughter.

He walked straight towards his step-daughter's rooms, and as he went in he said, in a brusque authoritative tone :

“ Mam'selle is there, I suppose.”

A dressmaker was kneeling down in front of an “ Angelina ” [dress-frame] fastening some flower-trimming to a skirt of pale satin. A maid was lighting a tall lamp, and as she had a needle and thread between her teeth, she only nodded towards the door of the dressing-room.

Valfon knocked at the door and then went in. Florence was seated in a dressing-robe before a mirror, polishing her nails and reading a novel, with her long, thick hair spread out over her shoulders, so that the gold dye with which she had been touching it up, could dry.

He began laying down on the marble cover of her dressing-table a few little sheets of the mauve note-paper which her mother used. And Florence, dumb and stupefied, recognised her mother's motto and her childish handwriting in these letters, while Valfon kept on pointing out the most indiscreet passages, passages which could have only one meaning.

Florence knew that her mother was what the world calls a bit of a flirt. Her friends, freer of speech than herself, had often chaffed her about it, and mentioned certain names of her brother's friends, and Raymond Eudeline's among them. But to Florence's innocent imagination a flirtation only meant a few harmless gallantries, a thousand miles removed from the infamy which this miserable step-father of hers was trying to suggest to her by such extracts as these.

“ Why am I always so sad, my beloved, when I leave you ? Why am I always so sorrowful after all the happiness that you give me ? ”

“ Thanks to your twenty years, my love, to that youth of yours, my dear golden-haired boy ! When you no longer love me, may I have death instead. It would be sweet if I could drink it from your lips ! ”

And it was her mother, her mother, who had written these shameful words !

Valfon seemed to take these proofs of his wife's guilt very quietly. But how had he got them ? Most of the letters had no envelopes, some were not even folded, and others were unfinished as though at the last moment some scruple had prevented her from sending them. But, again, how had he got them ? Florence was already trembling for her mother, lying as she was now at the mercy of this evil-minded man, and the golden light died out of her big eyes and her long black lashes fluttered like the wings of a bird in pain. Valfon himself pitied her, but it was only a physical sort of pity, as though for a creature that was too tender, too delicate, to be made to suffer. He put the letters in order again, and left the room.

Florence had only one idea now, and that was to get herself dressed as quickly as possible and go to her mother. This she did in spite of the protestations of her dressmaker. She found Madame Valfon just ready to get into her carriage, looking radiant and youthful in a dress of white satin, braided with silver wire, with a necklace of five rows of great pearls round her neck, and wearing mittens instead of gloves, so that the gems with which her fingers were loaded could be seen. The diamonds of La Belle Marques had been a tradition in the semi-Jewish society of Bordeaux. They had often

been hypothecated to pay Valfon's gambling debts, but as soon as he had become a statesman, with the management of secret funds, the Mont-de-Piété had known them no longer.

As soon as her daughter entered the room, her eyes seemed to ask in advance the anxious question :

“ What is the matter ? ”

They were to all intents and purposes in the room alone, although Zizi, Madame Valfon's huge mulatto woman, who had been her nurse, was moving silently about picking up scraps of paper and putting out candles. But Zizi's presence did not embarrass Florence at all. Indeed, that would have been almost impossible, for she was already nearly dying of shame at the thought of telling her mother that she had discovered that she had a lover.

By way of warning her of what was coming, she said abruptly, and literally forcing herself to speak :

“ Quick, Mamma, tell me about the letters you are getting and writing. Where do you keep them ? ”

“ There, in my English cabinet.”

“ And you have the key ? ”

“ Yes, I always carry it about with me.”

She took a tiny little gold key which never left her person, sometimes hung on her bracelet, sometimes attached to her watch, from her châtelaine, and then she opened the secretaire and took out a little blotting book and ran through the leaves quickly, at first, and then, leaf by leaf, growing paler all the while.

“ You need n't look for them ! ” said Florence in a low tone, “ he 's got them ; I 've just seen them.”

“ Ah, the scoundrel ; he has another key, then ! ”

“ But, my poor Mamma, you don't mean to say that you 've been making rough copies ? ”

And she stammered confusedly :

“ You see, dear, I am not a French woman, and the words don’t come as easily to me as they do to you, and for every letter that I write, or, at least, that I send, I write three or four.”

The truth was that the unhappy woman found herself unable to write in a strain sufficiently exalted or poetical in reply to the fine phrases which she received from Raymond. And so she had fallen into the habit of making rough draughts. She often wrote several of these before she made one to please her, or one which she thought worthy of sending to him. It was some of these that Valfon had found one day when he was going through her private papers.

“ Ah, poor Mamma ! ” whispered Florence, but her mother shook her head and answered :

“ Oh, no, it does n’t matter about me, dear, he has done me all the harm that he can, and I don’t fear him any longer. But how can I leave you here without me ? ”

“ But if you were n’t here, I should n’t be here either,” murmured Florence, as she threw her arms round her mother.

As she did so, there was a sharp knock at the door and Valfon opened it and put his head in and said :

“ Now, then, ladies, we are dining in England to-night, you know, and it is the fashion there to be punctual.”

As he said this, he looked at his wife narrowly. Did she know about it? Had her daughter warned her? In the semi-darkness of the big room it was difficult to tell, but afterwards when they were in the carriage on their way to the Embassy, he was astonished at the calmness and serenity of the mother and daughter, and

the quiet clearness of their eyes, bright as their own diamonds. Evidently Florence had not had time to speak to her. Practised and all as she was in the ways of the world, such a grave piece of news must have left its traces on her. However, as the carriage was crossing the Place de la Concorde in the direction of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and the Embassy, the Minister suddenly said :

“ Ah, there 's young Raymond Eudeline ! ”

And as he leaned over to see who was with him he fancied that he saw his wife shiver and turn pale for a moment.

Raymond was walking up and down the vestibule of the Chamber waiting for his patron, Marc Javel, when he saw Mauglas come in looking as jaunty and self-assertive as ever, in spite of his misfortune. He was just coming out of the Foreign Office and he went up to him with outstretched hand and said cheerily :

“ Ah-ha, my young friend, how goes it with everybody at Morangis, and in particular how is Mam'selle Genevieve ? ”

If he could have done so, Raymond would have been very glad to have cut him altogether. He felt ashamed of being seen in the company of such a man, a man who had been exposed as he had been, and he tried to keep him at a distance by replying to his greeting in a very formal fashion and by telling him what he was there for.

“ Oh yes, I know him ; Marc Javel 's not at all a bad fellow. Would you like me to speak to him for you ? ”

Raymond thanked him dryly and refused as politely as he could ; as he had been dancing attendance just now for some hours, and his legs were getting very tired, he decided not to wait any longer that day.

"Very well," said Mauglas, who saw as plainly as possible that Raymond was dying to get rid of him, "in that case, I shall take possession of you. Come along, we'll go and have some dinner together. No, you must n't say no! I can assure you it is quite a favour."

As he said this, he put his hand through Raymond's arm and drew him out of the vestibule. Raymond allowed himself to be persuaded, although he was furious with himself at his own weakness. And then, as they were going out, he tried to console himself by appealing to his own vanity. "After all," he thought, or tried to persuade himself to think, "what right have I to humiliate still further a man who has already fallen so low? After all, I am not his judge—and then look what talent the man has. He gets a thousand francs a page on the *Revue*." Besides, it was getting dusk now, and the hour was favourable to such compromises of conscience as this.

Mauglas took him to a restaurant in the Champs-Élysées, and when they got inside Raymond felt flattered to see the way in which the waiters came about Mauglas as they seated themselves at the little table on which stood a prettily shaded lamp.

"Well, now that I've got you here," said Mauglas, filling the two glasses with champagne, "I am going to tell you a story. No, you need n't be afraid, you'll find it worth the trouble of listening to. It's the story of a police spy."

Raymond stared at him, half in astonishment and half in alarm. Then the wretch was going to glory in his own infamy. This is what he brought him out to dinner for, literally to confess to him. And why? Was it because of that universal longing of human

remorse to relieve itself by confession at any price? Raymond felt his youthful vanity was gratified by this idea, although Mauglas, with his napkin tucked under his chin, eating and drinking with a splendid relish, looked like anything but a penitent. So he settled himself down to listen, while Mauglas, beginning at the beginning, told him the story of his life from the time when his father and mother kept a wayside inn near Saint-Lô, in Normandy; how from there he had passed with various adventures, amatory and otherwise, into the war of 1870, and had joined the *Francs-Tireurs* [irregular sharp-shooters] of Chapeau-Molard, and had led a wandering and picturesque life amidst the deserted villas of the suburbs in the constant intoxication which a spice of danger lent to his new calling, stealing everything that he could lay his hands on, getting drunk on good stolen wine, living like a millionaire one day and starving the next, until at last it was all over, and Paris had fallen.

Then he went back to his father's inn; he married an old sweetheart who had six or seven thousand francs in cash, and thought he was doing a good stroke of business. But his wife's little fortune did n't last very long, and, gradually, everything went for food. They were getting within sight of starvation when some of the papers began to take his copy.

"It was that which brought me into connection with Valfon," he said, when he had come to this point. "He was in the Ministry of the Interior then, and a little radical rag that I had been writing for had published a ferocious squib of mine on the President. I went to Valfon to beg him not to make the paper responsible for my stupidity. He laughed in my face and told me that the people who were running the paper were just



“ THIS IS WHAT HE BROUGHT HIM OUT TO DINNER FOR, LITERALLY TO CONFESS TO HIM.”

playing the fool with me. Then he said that I had great talents which I did n't know how to make any use of, and that, if I really cared to cut the connection and become respectable, he would find me a nice easy berth in which I should have a good salary and be able to make myself very useful to Government, by reporting the real state of popular opinion to the proper authorities. Then he recommended me to think it over, and if I decided that it was good enough I was to go and see the Prefect of Police, and take my instructions from him.

“ Well, I went home and spoke to the wife about it, and she put it plainly that I was making very little by my writing, and that there were a good many mouths to fill, and so the end of it was, that I decided to go in for it. As a matter of fact, I was very hard up just then, and the Prefect of Police lent me a thousand francs to be repaid just when I liked. That settled it, and from that day I was a slave.

“ At first I thought that I was simply taking honourable service under the Government, but I very soon found out that mistake. I was sent here, there, and everywhere ; I had to make the acquaintance of all sorts of revolutionaries and enemies of society. I had to listen to their conversation, get into their confidence, and then tell their secrets to my masters. In other words, I was a common spy. Then, after a few years, my wife died, and I took my father and mother down to Morangis to live in the bungalow next to the Izoards. That 's where I met Sophie Castagnozoff. That was rather dangerous for some of her fellow-countrymen in Paris, for she seemed to know all that they said and did, without believing their theories, and then for some reason or other she began to admire my

writing and that led us on to literature and languages. She began to teach me, as she thought, merely as a study in philology, the sort of slang which these people use, and without which you cannot really understand what is going on amongst them. Of course, you see, that was very useful to me, especially as just then I was attached to General Dejarine.

“Unfortunately he was one of those fellows who would not take care of himself. He simply laughed at all the precautions I took for him, although I knew that the International had already decreed his death. I was going to put the whole matter before this precious Minister of ours for Foreign Affairs when, like the liar and traitor that he is, he threw me over and publicly charged me with carelessness, and wanted to make me responsible for his death. Now there is only one way that I can save myself. I shall have to get, and I think you could help me here—but stop, there are some people coming. Let’s go; I will tell you the rest outside.”

A couple had just come and sat down at the neighbouring table. As Mauglas got up and walked past them with aggressively squared shoulders, the man whispered to the woman, and Mauglas turned round to Raymond and said in a tone that he intended to be heard:

“That’s Barnes. He’s Deputy for Vaucluse. He does n’t seem to know me now, and yet I can remember the time—I suppose you remember that dirty affair of his at the Palais-Royal?—when he was ready to go down on his knees and lick my boots; and there you are, you see, not so much as a nod now.”

He smiled at the young lady behind the counter and lit his pipe with a match that the waiter offered

him, while Raymond, who, like most of his build, was not much of a smoker, attacked a cigar with the result that his ideas, already somewhat warmed up by the champagne, got rather more confused than ever. Mauglas took his arm again and led him up into the darkness of the Champs-Élysées, hitting the ground constantly with the ferule of his cane.

"After all, for a student of human nature, it's not by any means a bad sort of job this that I've been telling you about, and that is why I want you to help me. I should be very sorry to have to leave it. Now I want you to look about among your acquaintances at the association, or elsewhere, for some smart fellow who would be willing for a matter of five or six hundred francs a month to spend a few hours now and then among the Russian refugees, and put down in plain words just exactly what he hears. He will have no responsibility; I should sign his reports and send them in to the Prefecture. The thing that I don't want to do, is to show myself openly among these people, because after what has happened, they'd simply kill me."

Raymond, in spite of the fumes of the champagne, could n't help seeing that this was, after all, the real reason why Mauglas had taken him out to dinner, and that all the story of his life and adventures had been nothing more than embroidery. He was n't particularly pleased with this and replied a little distantly :

"I am very sorry, M. Mauglas, but I'm afraid I do not know of anyone among my acquaintance who would be able to undertake work like that."

Then he stopped, blushing for some unaccountable reason, and afraid that, in spite of the darkness, someone could see him. How was it that he had this sudden and unaccountable terror of Mauglas? Why

should he feel this desperate desire to get away from him? Mauglas himself waited for a moment, and then replied quite calmly :

“ Oh yes, I dare say you would find it so, at first sight. Of course, one does n't meet with a man like that every few minutes, but I dare say when you come to think about it a little more you will see the matter in a different light. What I want you to bear in mind is this. Here 's a good job—no work, no danger, just wanting a little skill and knowledge of the world—going begging at six hundred francs a month. If you 'll take my tip, you 'll think of it seriously. You have my address, I think.”

They were walking along the pavement of the Avenue Gabriel, and as they passed one of the big houses standing back in its garden, they heard the notes of women's voices blended with the thrumming of guitars come floating out from where a swarm of lights betokened that a big party of some sort was in progress.

“ That 's the English Embassy, is n't it ? ” said Raymond, as they passed.

Mauglas stopped, looked at it for a moment, and said, “ No, the Embassy 's higher up, and besides that, those guitars are not quite like music of the band of the Republican Guard.”

As a matter of fact, however, it was the English Embassy, only the thick screen of ivy and trimmed shrubs was too high to allow them to see the front of the Hotel Borghese, within which, just at that moment, Valfon was sitting by the disordered table in the dining-room after the ladies had retired, talking earnestly to the Russian Ambassador, while his wife had gone with Miss Frida Ravenswood, the daughter of the British Ambassador, into the music-room.

A little later the doors of the dining-room were thrown open and the gentlemen went to join the ladies. As soon as she could get hold of him, Madame Valfon said somewhat abruptly to her husband :

“ What about this duel that Marc Javel has been telling me of during dinner, this duel which is to take place to-morrow ? ”

“ Well, well, Lo-lo,” he replied, with one of his clown’s grimaces, “ I thought that you knew all about that. Yes, it’s quite true, your son is going to fight to-morrow.”

“ And with whom, pray, and why ? ”

“ Claudius Jacquand, of course, and surely you know what for ! ”

She stifled an exclamation of anger, as she replied :

“ What, on account of this engagement of Florence’s ! Valfon, you don’t mean to say that this is really serious, do you ? ”

She looked at him steadily with pale face and burning eyes, and went on passionately :

“ You must telephone at once to the Prefect of Police ; I tell you this duel must not take place ! ”

He looked up at her with a little sneering, apish laugh, and said :

“ Pardon me, my dear, I shall do nothing of the kind. You see, I have n’t the same strong reasons for wanting Jacquand’s fortune to go into the Eudeline family as you have. You can do as you please about it, but I’m not going to have anything to do with it at all.”

He took advantage of the momentary confusion which this sudden mention of Eudeline caused her, to escape.



CHAPTER XVII

AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR

“**M**AM’SELLE EUDELINÈ, there ’s someone waiting for you downstairs.”

As the superintendent called this out above the bustle of the big work-room, every head was turned at the same moment towards Dina, who, with hands trembling with pleasure, shut her drawer, and went out amidst a general whisper, “Ah, it ’s Master Yellow Gloves again.”

As a matter of fact, she was expecting Claudius, for the day before she had had a telegram from him, saying that he had come back from Lyons, and was coming to see her at four o’clock. His father was better and wanted to make her acquaintance, and would do so as soon as he was able to travel.

She had waited at the porch until six o’clock without seeing him. Then she had sent a message to the Rue Cambon, but had had no reply to it. One can imagine, then, how delighted she was when the superintendent’s summons came. But what was her disappointment when she went tripping down the stairs and saw on the landing, instead of the tall figure and refined features of her lover, the homely figure and still more homely face of her brother Antonin !

“What,” she said, turning pale, “is it you? What is it, Tonin, what do you want?”

He could n’t help seeing that she was disappointed, and that she evidently expected someone else, and he stood there for a moment or two, stammering and twisting his fingers about before he could find words to tell her what he had come to say.

“Well, you see, Didine, it ’s this way. I ’m going to London, and I just came to have a kiss and say good-bye—and—there ’s another thing. You ’ll be wanting some money, and Raymond has taken back those bills and paid me in cash for the furniture. I did n’t want it, but he got angry and made me take it—and I ’ve also some other money saved up which I don’t want. Mamma won’t take anything from me now, because Raymond won’t let her, now that he has this publisher who gives him all the money he wants in advance, and so I thought that you—you—you might——”

But Dina had neither looks for her brother nor thoughts for the money, so she thanked him and said she did n’t want any.

“Well, then, if that ’s so, I tell you what I think I ’ll do with it. There ’s five thousand francs still owing for that building of father’s. I ’ll pay them over to M. Izoard. I don’t think Raymond would see anything wrong in that, would he?”

“Oh no, I am sure he would n’t,” she said absently. And then she suddenly took him by the hands and said in a trembling voice :

“Tonin, will you do me a very great service?”

She stroked his big hard hands with her little soft ones, which were hot with fever.

“I want you to go to the Rue Cambon, No. 6, and ask if M. Claudius Jacquand is really in Paris.”

“ What Jacquand—the rich Senator of Lyons ? ”

“ No, not he, his son.”

Tonin stuck his thick lips out with a gesture of hesitation and said slowly :

“ I ’ll go anywhere you like, Didine, only I ’d like to know—of course you know what I mean—there is n’t anything in it that would give poor mamma any uneasiness, is there ? ”

Her blue eyes opened a little wider and she stared at him as she said in a low, firm tone :

“ There certainly is a secret which I must keep, and you must keep for me at all costs, but look.” As she said this she drew a little medal out of her blouse at the end of a fine gold chain. “ She is the cause of it all. She began my romance, for there is a romance in it, Tonin ; but how could you think that there could be anything wrong in it when Notre Dame de Fourvières has taken charge of it ! ”

“ That ’s all right, Didine, I ’ll go at once, wherever you want me to,” said Tonin, with his plebeian accent and his sweet, honest smile.

When Tonin reached No. 6, Rue Cambon, he found a splendidly-attired butler talking with considerable agitation to a little knot of servants. Tonin joined the group just in time to hear him reply to a reporter :

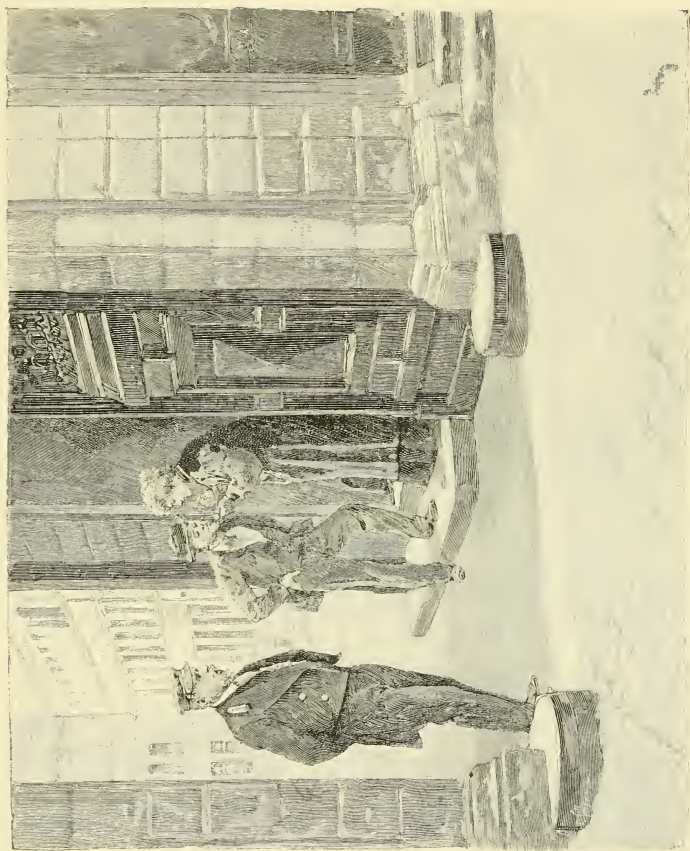
“ No, we have not had any news yet of M. Claudius.”

“ And what time was the duel ? ”

“ It was for nine o’clock, and it ’s now eleven. I ’m astonished that I have not heard anything before this, for Dr. Hurbar, M. Claudius’s physician, promised me——”

“ Dr. Hurbar, I think you said ? ”

As the reporter was putting this down, Tonin went up to him and said :



" SHE DREW A LITTLE MEDAL OUT OF HER BLOUSE. "

“ Is it known whom M. Jacquand has been fighting with ? ”

“ Where have you come from ? ” said the reporter, without turning his head ; “ Wilkie Marques, of course.”

“ Oh, that ’s impossible, Wilkie the—the what ’s its name——”

He wanted to say, “ Wilkie, my brother’s friend—Wilkie, who was in love with Didine ”; but in such moments the words very seldom came to him, and the journalist put him down for one of those half-witted loafers who are always to be found wandering about the streets of Paris.

“ Ah ! there it is at last,” said the butler, as a telegraph messenger came towards him with a little blue envelope in his hand. The telegram was from the Doctor and ran as follows :

“ Serious wound in right groin, complicating femoral artery. Symptoms very grave; cannot be moved. Advise father.”

“ Fancy that ! ” thought Tonin ; “ the son of a Senator and such a rich man ! ”

A silence of consternation followed, which the reporter took advantage of to copy the telegram.

Tonin started off back to Dina at once. He found her with her hat and jacket on, walking up and down in front of the entrance, burning with impatience.

“ Yes, yes, I know,” she said as he came up ; “ the telegram came through here from Choisy, and I ’ve been waiting just for you to come and tell me where the duel took place, because if he can’t be moved, well, I want to go where he is.”

“ Very well, I ’ll go with you, Didine; you could n’t go alone, you know.”

“ But what about your journey ? ”

“ Oh, never mind about that. ”

He said this with a sort of shrug of the shoulders which was his usual way of indicating that any matter which merely concerned himself was put off indefinitely.

“ Very well, then, ” she said, slipping her trembling hand through his arm, “ let us go. ”

The telegram had come through from Choisy le Roi, which is the first station on the Orleans line. When they got there they found that the duel had taken place on the other side of the Seine ; after several inquiries they managed to find that it had been at a country hotel called the *Pavillon Pompadour*, where people went for picnics and wedding feasts and celebrations of that sort.

On the way, Dina told Tonin how the whole thing had come about, and how Wilkie, having failed to obtain her consent or her mother's to an engagement which would have forestalled Claudius, must have taken the opportunity of picking a quarrel with him on his sister's account with the real intention of killing him or maiming him for life.

When they at length reached the *Pavillon Pompadour*, they found the landlord quite ready to talk about the dreadful affair, as he called it, and he told them how M. Wilkie had often been out there with parties of ladies and gentlemen, and that when he had come to him and asked him for the use of his ball-room—as the grass was wet and slippery—to fight the duel in, he could n't very well refuse.

Dina, however, very soon cut his gossip short by saying kindly but impatiently :

“ Yes, yes, M'sieu', it 's very good of you to tell us all this, but we have come to see the unfortunate gentle-

man who is wounded. Can you tell us where we can find him ? ”

“ Ah yes, the wounded man,” said the hotel-keeper. He is in the ball-room. You see, he was so badly wounded that he could not be taken away, and so we have put up a bed for him there. There is a doctor and a Sister of Mercy with him, and I suppose the Doctor is a friend of the family, because he came from Lyons, and he has taken two rooms here for the young gentleman’s father, who is coming.”

Dina changed colour when he said this.

“ What, his father, is he coming ? ”

“ Yes, Madame, he will be here in about two hours.”

So saying, he opened the door of the room, and Dina, looking in, saw amidst all the incongruous surroundings of the huge place, its gaudy decorations, hanging lamps, and painted rafters, and its huddled-up chairs and tables, a little bed, on the pillow of which lay the white face of her lover. The Doctor was reclining in a chair in the resigned attitude of a man who had done everything that could be done and yet expected little from it, and the white head-dress of a sister of Saint Vincent de Paul seemed floating about the room in the half-light of the curtained windows.

At the sound of the opening door the Doctor raised his head and then rose and came quickly towards Dina, saying :

“ Mam’selle Eudeline, is it not ? ”

His looks and his voice were kindly, and Dina, feeling a sob rising in her throat, replied with a nod. Then the Doctor went on :

“ He is alive, Mam’selle, but that is all I can say. But since he fell there ”—pointing to a big dark stain on the floor—“ he has not regained consciousness, and

he has neither opened his eyes nor moved. I suppose you know how it has all happened. I know what you are to him. Late last night he wrote his farewell to you, in case the worst should happen, but he did not send the letter. I suppose some strange fancy restrained him. You know, we Lyonnais are rather superstitious."

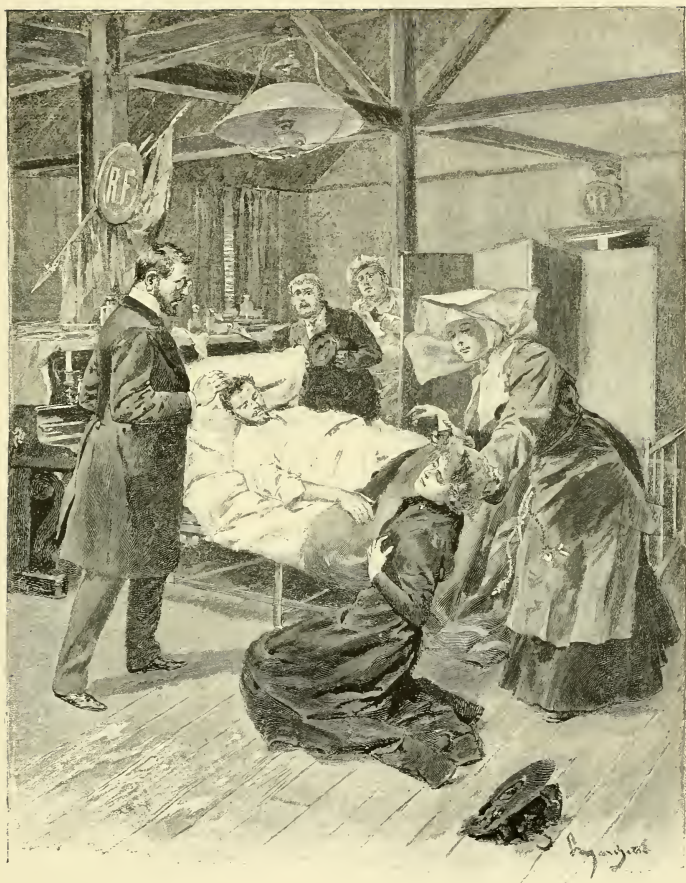
While the doctor was speaking, Dina had gone and thrown herself on her knees beside the bed. A long, limp, white hand was lying on the counterpane, inert and alternately burning and perspiring. She took it between hers and leaned over him and said :

" Claude, it is I, Dina ; I am here with my heart close to yours ; look at me, tell me that you know me ! "

For the first time the wounded man moved, and it seemed as though all the strength that was left in him was exerted. It was an effort of his whole being, made just to show that he had heard her voice and recognised her. His eyelids lifted a little and then fell back, the faintest possible flush came to his cheeks and died away again. Then the tears which she had been keeping back since the morning burst forth in a flood over the dear burning hand, and she knelt there kissing it, mingling her tears and her kisses with the sweat of his agony, until she fell fainting beside the bed.

While the poor little Cinderella was thus treading the way of sorrow in the ball-room of the holiday resort, her mother was sitting in the shop, turning over the pages of her book with distracted fingers and looking from the clock to the shop door and back again.

" How late Dina is this afternoon ! " she said for the fortieth time, after she had seen the girls from the



" SHE KNELT THERE KISSING THE DEAR BURNING HAND UNTIL SHE FELL FAINTING BESIDE THE BED."

municipal schools come past with their little satchels on their arms. And then at last the shop-bell rang.

"Well, Dina, is that you at last?"

No, it was someone taller, bigger, that came in, someone who walked more slowly, with pale face and down-bent head, as though the weight of her hair was weighing it down.

"What, you, Tantine! Come in, quick, and sit down and let me look at you. What an age it is since I've seen you!"

And in the delight of meeting again the girl whom she loved almost as much as her own children, Madame Eudeline did not notice that Genevieve never met her glance, and that her own pretty, grey eyes were nearly always cast down or looking askance. It was, however, when the old lady persisted in calling her *ma fille* that Genevieve was most troubled, for this word reminded her of the miserably false position into which she allowed her love to betray her, and the contrast between her life now and what it might have been—and then there were these everlasting falsehoods, these lying excuses to her old father in order to account for her many absences.

"But you know, dear, I am always here in the evenings; you'll always find me then, and I shall be very glad to see you any night you like."

"Oh yes, I know," said Genevieve, blushing, for she had not yet learned the art of lying without getting confused; "only, you know, Casta is in Paris now."

"Yes, my dear," said Madame Eudeline, "that is all very well, and Sophie is a very good girl with her grand philanthropic ideas, but, you know, you ought to be thinking more of your old father now, for you are all that he has. I know that he says you are free

now, and all that sort of thing, but take care you don't get with him as Dina is with me. When I ask her what is the matter with her, she says, 'Oh, nothing,' and all the time I know that there is; yet I am no nearer to finding out than I was that day you spoke to her."

"Ah, is that so?"

It was really these conversations about Dina that had kept her away from the house. She felt herself unworthy now of the confidence that Madame Eudeline placed in her, unworthy of the task of warning this clean-hearted young girl. What miserable hypocrisy it all was!—and yet, how was she to get out of it? And then, while she was thinking of this, Madame Eudeline began on the same old story, the distrust that Dina seemed to have for her, and her constant refusal to admit her into her confidence, until Genevieve cut her short by saying :

"My dear Mamma Eudeline, I really think that you are troubling yourself for nothing. After all, what can there be in the dreams of a young girl who has slept with her mother every night for years, and I suppose thinks more about chaplets and crosses and consecrated medals than anything else!"

Then some customers came in, and while Madame Eudeline was explaining the advantages of the Wonderful Lamp to the last of these Raymond entered. It always gave him now, as was natural, a peculiarly painful shock to find his mother and Genevieve together, and his embarrassment was so obvious that Madame Eudeline noticed it, and, wondering what was the matter, said :

"Well, do you think there's anything wonderful in meeting Genevieve here like this? She only came to

see her Tonin, and, after all, she was n't able to say good-bye to him. The poor fellow had gone already, and he went away quite vexed and sad because I would not take his money." Then she turned to Genevieve, and said proudly :

" But is n't it delightful to see these two boys disputing this way for the honour of keeping their poor old mother ! "

How bitter would have been the sorrow of her humiliation if she had only known the feelings of her adored son as he heard her talking before Genevieve about the money that had come from her, for he had already encroached largely on the thirty thousand francs which he had sworn never to touch ! The promptings of his vanity, the necessity of keeping up his pretensions as the eldest son, as the Head of the Family, had driven him to break his oath. Genevieve, however, knew nothing about it, for she never went to the drawer where the money was, and he kept on persuading himself that there would be no need to tell her anything about it until he had fulfilled his dream of writing a book or a play and was able to replace what he had taken. When he spoke again, his tone was hard and almost brutal, as though he wanted to punish his poor old mother for her indiscretion :

" Where 's Dina ; has n't she come back yet ? "

" No, I suppose she must have been kept late at the office."

Raymond, who was walking nervously up and down the shop, turned round and said :

" At the office ! I 've just come from there. She left before midday."

" Before midday !"—and the poor mother fell sobbing on Tantine's shoulder.

" Ah, did n't I tell you that she was keeping something terrible from me ! "

" Something terrible ! Yes, I should think so," said Raymond, " this death of Claudius Jacquand."

And Madame Eudeline repeated without understanding :

" Claudius Jacquand ? "

" Yes, the fellow she intended to make your son-in-law. Well, now he 's dead, or, at any rate, not much better——"

And then he went on in a few rapid sentences to tell the romance of the little Cinderella and the Prince Charming whom she met at the ball, from the vows that they exchanged almost at their first meeting down to this terrible duel which all the newspapers were talking about. And just as he had come to the end of it, and was telling how Wilkie had given Claudius exactly what he had promised—a bullet in the groin,—the door-bell jangled again and in came Tonin and Cinderella herself, pale-faced and red-eyed, choking with sobs under her veil. She went into the inner room and her mother went after her, while the two brothers and Genevieve fell to talking round the counter in the semi-darkness of the shop, which no one seemed to think of lighting up.

" And is he dead ? " asked Raymond, when Tonin had finished the story of their visit to the *Pavillon Pompadour*.

" No, not quite, but very nearly. They don't know whether he 'll get through the night."

" Has he written to her, do you know ? Has he left any will ? "

" No, I don't think so."

Raymond felt a thrill of evil pleasure at this. He

would not have been at all sorry to see his sister make a wealthy marriage which would have profited the family generally ; but, while his mother and Tonin respected the intentions of his father and looked up to him as the Head of the Family, Dina had shown an independence and spirit of revolt which the possession of a large fortune would only exaggerate, and so, secretly, his pride was flattered and gratified.

Presently Madame Eudeline came back, sorrowful with her daughter's sorrow, but glad that she at last knew her secret. She told them that she was utterly broken down and had gone to bed. If Tonin would not mind taking charge of the shop until closing time she would sit up with her and nurse her. Tonin agreed gladly. His luggage had gone on to the station, and so it would be quite a kindness to him if he could stop. Then Raymond said :

“ Well, Tonin, good-bye. I hope you 'll have a pleasant journey to-morrow ; I must be off to work. I shall have to do double turns now, with the keep of the family and the sister's portion to find. I 'm afraid that I can't hope to replace the five or six hundred thousand francs a year that she has lost over this unhappy business, but, I dare say, I could do something respectable for her.”

“ And do you really think you can do that ? Just think of that, now ; won't that be nice ! ” said Madame Eudeline proudly to the other two.

“ And you 'll let me do something towards it, won't you ? ” said Tonin, timidly ; “ you 'll let me help you to marry Didine ? I ought to do something, you know.”

“ Oh yes, of course, if you wish to,” said the other, grandiloquently ; “ but, my dear fellow, what will you be able to do with your military service coming on ?

Where will you find a moment to think about such matters? I 'm always thinking about this conscription of yours. In fact, I 'm going to see Marc Javel about it, and try if something can't be done."

" Ah yes, is that so? Do you really think about me in that way? How good that is of you !"

And while Tonin was thanking his brother almost with tears in his eyes, Madame Eudeline whispered to Genevieve :

" Ah, if my poor husband is watching us now from where he is, how happy he must be ! He has given us a true Head of the Family."





CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE LOBBY

TWO days afterwards the old Chief of the Reporting Department took Raymond, according to his promise, to the Palais-Bourbon to have his interview with Marc Javel, who had attained his present ambition and had been in possession of the portfolio of the Ministry of Marine for the last two or three days.

It was quite a sight to see the old man strolling about the corridors of the Palais-Bourbon, bareheaded, with his big white beard floating from side to side, dragging Raymond hither and thither by the arm, pointing out officials and celebrities who were filling the passages in ever-increasing numbers, waiting for the reception-rooms to open at two o'clock. He showed him people who had come for favours and those who had favours to give away, the people who had come with money in their pockets, or promises in their mouths, and then he pointed out the officials and the Ministers to whom the money would be given for promises made concerning privileges and concessions which would not be reported in the public press.

Then the old man launched out into a diatribe on the corruption of modern parliamentary institutions as compared with the purity of his own dear old times of

'48 when people were really Republicans and not a lot of political stock-jobbers and concession-mongers.

"Do you know what I would do with this place, my dear Raymond?" he said, stopping and embracing the whole vast building with one comprehensive gesture. "I would close all the doors for three years, but I would open all the windows so that the place could get disinfected, for it is plague-stricken, Raymond, it is plague-stricken! Since the death of Gambetta it has become rotten. It is money, money, money everywhere, and the country nowhere. That is why I would close the doors for three years. I would show the country that it can get on without these people, that it would be much better without them. Now, for instance, take that fellow Simeon, the one who wanted to marry Genevieve and would n't, at the last moment, because her fortune was twenty thousand francs short."

Raymond, as usual, looked rather uncomfortable at the mention of Genevieve's name, but the old man was too much preoccupied to notice it, and he rattled on.

"You know him, of course; he's a clerk here in one of the Government offices, and since he backed out of his engagement with Genevieve he has made a rich marriage; but he still keeps on his clerkship. Why does he do that, do you suppose? Because he's in need of the salary? Not a bit of it. It's because his official position enables him to get information before people outside can get it, and that's useful to him on the Bourse. And then, you know, people come to him with schemes that they want laid before the different departments, the Interior, the Army, the Marine, and the more they bribe him the quicker the scheme gets to the right people. There's one of them now. I know him—Robert de Fabry. He's trying to work a

new steamship line to the Brazils, and I suppose he 's come to see our new Minister of Marine."

As he said this, he pointed out a tall, handsome young Creole who was coming towards them. Raymond recognised him as a friend of Wilkie's, whom he had often seen in his company, but for some reason the newcomer did not recognise him. He may have had his instructions from Wilkie, or it may have been because his real business at the moment was to borrow ten louis from old Izoard, which, after a very decided refusal and a little persuasion, he ultimately succeeded in doing.

"Just like the rest," said the old man, as he came back to Raymond's side, "money, money! I don't suppose I shall ever see much of that again, and yet he 's talking about making fifty thousand francs out of his scheme, and a hundred thousand for Marc Javel if he will take it up. Well, there 's the door opening ; come along.

"There he is, our new Minister of Marine, and I 'll be bound that the fellow who gets to him first is some parasite or other, some symptom of the social disease."

M. Marc Javel was standing, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, leaning against the pedestal of the bronze statue of Laocoön, well dressed, well groomed, and prosperous-looking, expanding in the warmth of his new promotion. There were a lot of people standing round him and he was thoroughly enjoying the dignity of his first portfolio, for hitherto he had never been anything more than Assistant Secretary of State. Robert de Fabry and Jaques Walter were talking to him very earnestly, but as the old man approached within earshot they suddenly stopped and discreetly moved away.

“ Well, Monsieur le Ministre, I have relieved you of a couple of sharpers there, so that is something for you to thank me for ! ” laughed the old man, as he greeted him.

“ Oh, come, come, M. Izoard, we must make a little allowance for youth, you know. Young men can’t get on nowadays, unless they are a trifle sharp.”

There was just a something, just a trifling change of tone and manner, but it was quite enough to show them that Marc Javel, too, had changed with his new dignity. This was very marked in his greeting of Raymond, whom the old man presented as usual as “ the son of our comrade Eudeline, one of the old sort of Republicans, such as you don’t see nowadays.”

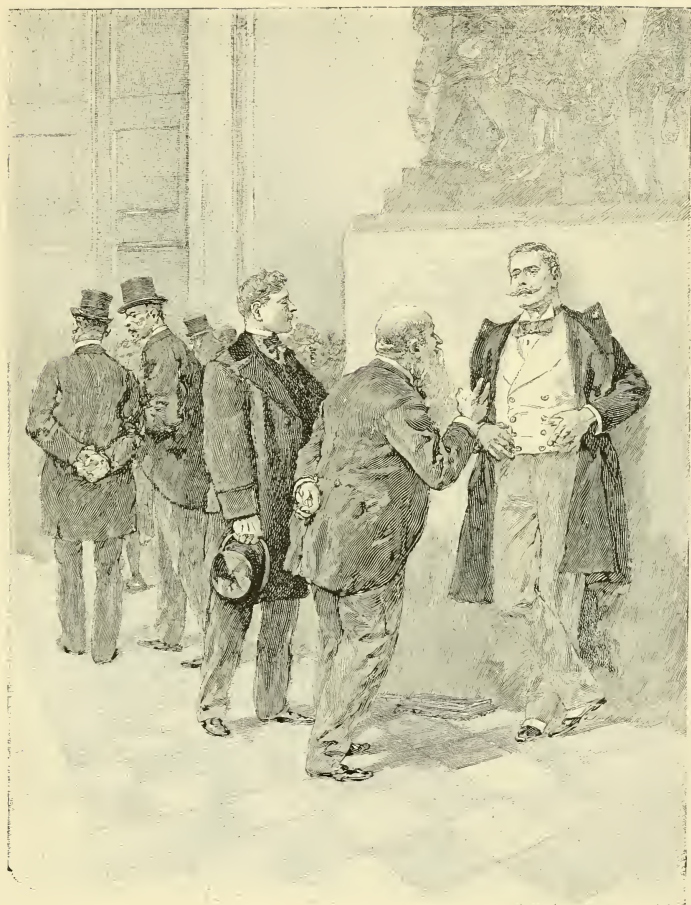
“ Yes, I remember having met your good father several times,” replied the Minister, in formal and distant tones. “ I remember him as a faithful and useful servant of the Republic.”

The old stenographer, whose back was beginning to rise at this haughty and distant reception, interrupted him a trifle nervously :

“ But, Monsieur le Ministre, Victor Eudeline and you, as nearly as I can remember, were members of the same lodge and attended those famous Good-Friday dinners which we held as a protest for Free Thought, and when you did n’t occupy the chair as President, he did. Ah, we don’t do that sort of thing nowadays ! ”

The Minister smiled and gave a twist to one end of his moustache. All this sort of thing looked very childish to him now, and he made no secret of it.

“ A moment, M. Izoard ! A few minutes ago I was talking on this spot to M. de Fabry, who is a friend of Wilkie Marques, and was his second in this unhappy



“WELL DRESSED, WELL GROOMED, AND PROSPEROUS-LOOKING, EXPANDING IN THE WARMTH OF HIS NEW PROMOTION.”

duel with Jacquand, and he was telling me that, in consequence of the gravity of the wound, the seconds, both young men, by common consent, placed a priest and a Sister of Saint Vincent de Paul in attendance upon the young man out of respect for his religious opinions. Now, I think you will admit that that is a very significant fact."

"Well, certainly, in my time," growled the old man, "when we had an affair of that sort we did n't trouble ourselves very much about priests; but I can tell you this, Monsieur le Ministre, that if the rising generation which is just now getting into Parliament is to be what they call religious, the country won't gain very much by their coming into power. We have had scoundrels and now we shall have hypocrites."

He was beginning to talk loudly in his excitement, and the Deputies who were standing near the Minister began to close in as if they expected something of a scene. Marc Javel looked round with an indulgent smile and said :

"You are always talking about thieves and rascals, M. Izoard, but where is it that you really see them?"

"You 'd have to put your eyes out not to see them, Monsieur le Ministre," and then, pointing to a big, stout man who was coming along with his head thrown back and his coat flapping open, showing a broad expanse of white waistcoat, he went on :

"There, for instance, take your colleague Vourey, near whom you were sitting this morning at the Council of Ministers. Do you mean to say that he's an honest man? Why, when he took the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs he was as poor as a mouse and as thin as a rail, but now look at him—as fat as a pig and as rich as he is fat, and he 'll get richer still if he

can only get the Chamber to adopt that project of his for replacing all the old telegraph wires with aluminium bronze. Jaques Walter makes no secret of it that he has millions ready to square the Commission if necessary."

There were murmurs of disapprobation in the little crowd about them as he said this, and the Minister took advantage of this, saying in a dry tone :

" Oh, no, no, my dear sir, now you are going much too far ! "

" Too far, am I ? Then ask young Eudeline here, whose sister is employed at the Posts and Telegraphs, and he can tell you how Vourey makes the state pay for his little games with Casati, the dancer at the Folis-Bergères. At the central office in the Rue de Grenelle, everyone knows about that splendid suite of rooms which were let for almost nothing just because it was supposed that the Minister was taking them for the Government, and that they were to be used for Government purposes."

Marc Javel shrugged his shoulders and said half pityingly :

" Will this Izoard never grow old ? Is he always going to be a child, and so near his retirement too ! "

And then, without noticing the sudden pallor in which the ardour of the old man was all at once extinguished at the mention of the word " retirement," he turned towards Raymond and said :

" And now, young man, if you please, time presses and I shall have to go into the reception-room soon. What can I do for you ? "

Whether it was the splendour of the place, or the new title of Marc Javel, or the cold reception that he had given him, Raymond had never felt so nervous

and abashed in the presence of his protector as he did now. He tried to tell him about Antonin, about the drawing for the conscription which was coming on, of the cruel responsibilities which his father had left to himself, but while he was trying to do this the words failed him, he began to stammer like his brother, and at last the old man took up his preamble for him.

“ Let me say it for you, little man, you ’ll never get it out at that rate, and besides there are some circumstances in your father’s life which you don’t know, which he confided, when he was dying, to your mother and Marc Javel and myself.”

The Minister permitted a sympathetic sigh to escape from his breast and murmured :

“ Ah, yes, I remember the very sad episode that you allude to. Poor Victor Eudeline, he was a man who never had any head for business ! ”

“ But, for all that, he knew how to die in order to save his children from misery and dishonour, and there ’s just as much credit in that as there is in the pride of position ! ” retorted the old man. But the words were hardly out of his mouth before he regretted them, and he went on in a very humble tone to ask if the Minister could not procure for the youngest son of the Eudelines some of the favours which had been so easily accorded to the elder—for instance, one year of service instead of five, and facilities which would enable him to go on earning the money on which the family was depending. For it must be remembered that, granted the same energy and good intentions in both of them, while Raymond had taken the Diploma of Honour for Philosophy in the General Assembly, and would be Doctor of Laws and Licentiate of Letters, Tonin, his younger brother, was still a poor electrical workman,

and up to now had managed to maintain the whole family, to be, in short, the real Head of the Family.

Was there no way of getting him to stop, this chattering old dreamer whose every sentence stabbed Raymond's pride like a knife, furious as he already was for ever having undertaken this miserable appeal to Marc Javel, who meanwhile had been carefully preparing his reply for the benefit of the Deputies within earshot ! He had taken his thumbs out of his arm-holes, but now put them back, and said in a loud and somewhat pompous tone :

" My dear sir, for the last hour you have been walking up and down the corridors with this young man trying to make him believe that the Palais-Bourbon is inhabited by scoundrels. Well, now I want him to go away from here with the conviction that those who make the laws know how to respect them, and how to make them respected. As the eldest son of a widow and Head of the Family, Raymond Eudeline has certain privileges and prerogatives to which his younger brother cannot pretend. You must expect nothing further from me, not the shadow of a favour or a word of recommendation. It would be an injustice of which I am absolutely incapable—but there is the President. Gentlemen, I must ask you to allow me to say good-day ; my duties call me elsewhere."

He bade them a rapid good-bye, just touching their hands with the ends of his fingers, and then followed the crowd of Ministers and Deputies streaming away in the direction from which they could hear a sharp sound of military commands and the rhythmical ring of rifle-butts on the pavement.

" Ah, well, that 's all over now," said Izoard, taking the arm of the crushed and bewildered Raymond. " I

know this Marc Javel now. He has entered the Valfon Ministry, and he is as much contaminated as the others ; but he is more skilful than any of them, and he has a manner with him that will take him farther than the best of them. However, so far as depending on him or expecting anything from him, it 's of no use for your mother to be thinking about it now."

Mixed up with the crowd of journalists and Deputies, they had approached the doors of the reception chamber, which had just been thrown open. Two files of bayonets and red trousers reached from the entrance of the hall to the gallery which led to the private apartments of the President of the Chamber. As he came along between two officers with drawn swords, every head was bowed. A loud voice shouted "Present arms !" and a roll of drums swept through the echoing arches of the corridors.





CHAPTER XIX

TWO LETTERS

“ To Antonin Eudeline, London :

“ You will have learned by this time, from the letters you have had from your people and the French papers that you have seen, why your friend Sophie has left your last letter unanswered for some months. As for my own story of the adventure, and some other things connected with it, here it is, put as shortly as I can :

“ As soon as you had gone away to England, I took some very quiet rooms where I hoped to be able to stay unnoticed until that affair of the Boulevard Beaumarchais had blown over and was forgotten, and that big savage of mine, Lupniak, would be able to get away out of Paris. Of course, he had to keep even quieter than myself, but at the same time it was necessary for him to do something towards getting a living, and in this I was able to help him. You know that I had begun doctoring children in Paris to get my hand in before going to India. Well, near to the rooms I was living in there was a wood-yard belonging to the mother of one of my little patients, and I got her to give Lupniak, of course without telling her who he was, a situation as night watchman. His chief work was seeing that the sparks from the engines—the line

runs close by the yard—did n't set the wood on fire. This, you see, kept him up all night, and during the day he was able to stop in his little cabin, where I used to go and see him, and take him books and newspapers, and cheer him up as well as I could.

“Unfortunately, he got discontented with his confinement and insisted on coming to see me sometimes when I was receiving my little patients. He used to come disguised with a wig and a pair of spectacles that made him look as though he were a brother physician come for consultation. In this way he made the acquaintance of Père Alcide, and it was through him, or rather through his little boy, whom I've made quite well again, that Lupniak's misfortune came about. The little lad, as you know, was very fond of hearing his father's stories of the war and the Commune, and so Lupniak got into the habit of going to the Alcide's to tell him stories of his own adventures. Well, the police traced him there, and caught him. I knew nothing about it until two days afterwards, when the owner of the wood-yard came to tell me that her night watchman had disappeared.

“I did all I could to find him, but without success, and then one day there came, in the guise of a most inoffensive circular, a summons requiring me to present myself forthwith before the Judge of Instruction at the Palais de Justice. Of course I had to go, but nothing that they could do would get me to admit that I had any complicity with Lupniak in his revolutionary projects, or that he had ever even told me anything about them. Nevertheless, the judge tried to get me to endorse all sorts of abominations about this dear fellow whom I'm really very fond of, and who has never hurt anybody except social beasts of prey and enemies of the

human race. Of course I refused again, and the end of it was that the judge said to me :

“ ‘ I ’m very sorry, Mam’selle, but I shall be obliged to keep you for the present at the disposition of justice.’

“ It was rather prettily put, but it meant imprisonment all the same, and for several weeks I was kept in absolute solitude in a cell in the Conciergerie with nothing else to do than to wonder how my poor little patients were getting on without me.

“ At last, one afternoon, the door of my cell opened and I was ordered to come out. I was taken back to the same room in which I had been interrogated, and the same man said to me, but this time much more politely : ‘ We have come to the conclusion not to be too hard upon you, Mam’selle. It would appear that you have some very fine friends.’ And then he looked at me as though he had fallen in love with my poor ugly face, and I stood there wondering as to the source of my good fortune without daring to ask him, while he signed my discharge and gave it to me as politely as if he wanted to marry me for the sake of my fine friends, whoever they were.

“ You can imagine how delighted I was once more to breathe the free air, and to be able to go about among my little patients again. They all came back to me except the daughter of the woman who owned the wood-yard, and she was angry with me because the police had been to Lupniak’s cabin and rummaged through it, and then told her that I had got her to employ a most dangerous criminal.

“ Two days after I had recovered my liberty, I had a very curious visit from a lady which I must tell you about. My consultation was just over for the day and I had thrown open the windows to get rid of the smell



"I HAD JUST LIT A CIGARETTE, WHEN IN CAME A HANDSOME WOMAN, SPLENDIDLY DRESSED."



of sickness, and had just lit a cigarette, when in came a handsome woman, splendidly dressed, and looking rather like some great singer or other professional, but, in spite of the rouge on her cheeks and the colour under her eyes, there was something very gentle and natural about her. She talked to me very kindly about my patients and, especially, about the hospitals that I hope some day to found in India. Then she asked me if I would take an assistant and on what conditions. She was asking me, she said, for one of her friends, a woman of the world, weary of doing nothing, and ashamed of the selfishness and barrenness of her life. She was, in fact, a dead woman who wanted to live again.

“For my own part, I must say I wondered whether she was talking about a friend or herself, because I could hear something in her voice which seemed to tell me that she, too, was weary of all the vanities of this Parisian life, which seems, after all, to have so much sadness in it. Before she went away, she told me that I should have a visit from her friend in a few days, and then she gave me her address. It was ‘Madame Valfon, Quai d’Orsay,’ and then I began to think that she must be one of the fine friends who had persuaded the judge to let me go.

“That, however, did n’t give me any clue to what I wanted to know much more badly, and that was the name of the Judas who had betrayed Lupniak. Everybody in ‘Little Russia’ firmly believed that Mauglas was the traitor, and that after his denunciation by the Minister of Foreign Affairs he had seen that there was only one way of getting back into the favour of the Russian police, and that was to give up the murderer of Dejarine. They were so sure of it that they told me

that before long, if I liked, they would bring him before me trussed like a fowl, and force him to confess with his own lips. I, however, still doubted it, because I could not bring myself to believe that a man of such brilliant talent as his could have become so vile and could have sunk so low.

“ Well, the days and weeks went on and, at last, the Assizes came. Lupniak, who had denied all knowledge of the affair at the first inquiry in order to give his comrades time to get away in safety, now calmly confessed the whole thing and promised to begin his ‘cannibal hunt’ again if ever he escaped from the perpetual penal servitude to which they condemned him.

“ A week or two after the trial I received an invitation to a soirée of the Société l’Abeille, 4 Rue de Rivoli. Now, I never heard of such a society in my life, but Deamoff’s name scrawled across a card told me that it was really an invitation from my friends of ‘Little Russia,’ and so the next Saturday at the appointed hour I went to the address and found that the soirée was being held in a sort of cellar-crypt under a tavern. I soon saw that some business was on foot. There were two rows of seats round the cellar filled with men and women whom I had known in ‘Little Russia,’ and they recognised me with nods and smiles. At one end there was a table covered with pistols and carbines, and at this sat Deamoff and two other Little Russians looking as stern as judges and as silent as executioners.

“ I had scarcely got into my place when there was suddenly a great commotion about the entrance. All jumped to their feet, and then in the midst of tremendous excitement, Mauglas, hatless and with his clothes all torn, and bound from head to foot, was pushed and hustled and carried into the cellar by three or four

powerful fellows, and behind them came a tall, pale, handsome girl, smiling wickedly, and dressed all in white like a bride. She was the decoy who had lured him into the toils, and when the spy was allowed to speak, and recognised that there was no hope of rescue in such a place, his first words were said to her. He bowed to her as well as he could, and said almost pleasantly: ' You see, Mam'selle, what the vanity of a writer can lead him to ! Just a couple of letters, complimenting me on my last story, were bait enough to catch me. At the same time I must confess that I did n't come to your rendezvous without certain suspicions, and when I heard the door close behind me, and that pretty little hand of yours took hold of mine—well, there, it 's no use worrying about that now.' Then he turned to the company generally and said in an almost mocking tone : ' And now, ladies and gentlemen, what can I do to oblige you ? '

" No one answered him, and in the midst of a horrible silence Deamoff and the others went on examining a packet of letters which had been found on the unhappy wretch, who was standing there in the middle of the cellar, doing his best to keep his head up and prevent his knees from shaking. All the while I was thinking, dear Antonin, of the Tree of Liberty at Morangis, and the people coming from Paris every Saturday afternoon, and the old Mauglases, his mother and father, waiting for their son who was all the world to them.

" When Deamoff got up to read the accusation, I closed my eyes, but he answered so bravely and sincerely that I could not help looking at him. They had set him free now. He stood there with his hands in the pockets of that everlasting velvet jacket of his, and

when he spoke there was n't a trace of fear on his face. 'Why,' he said, 'should I take the trouble to deceive you, when I have no hope of getting away from here without something happening to me? Still, that's no reason why I should accuse myself falsely. I had nothing whatever to do with the arrest of Lupniak.'

" 'But,' said Deamoff, 'do you mean to say that you have not helped the Russian police as a spy?'

" 'Yes,' he said, with perfect coolness, 'I have been a spy; but I'm not one now. Dejarine's death lost me my place.'

" 'Nevertheless, you have implored to be taken back, and here are two letters from the Minister of Police at St. Petersburg.'

" And then Mauglas replied as coolly as ever, 'Well, yes, it was a good place.'

" They did n't let him finish. Everybody began shouting at once, and they seemed ready to fall upon him and tear him in pieces, and yet I caught myself thinking that very likely some of those who were shouting the loudest would have been very glad to have had his place.

" Then one of the judges got up and said to him, 'One thing is quite certain, and that is that you have done everything to keep your job as a spy. As a proof of it there is this letter which we have found upon you from a young man to whom you offered half of your pay to go and spy for you in places where you dare n't go yourself, but, more decent than you, he refused. He had not the courage to go and mix with these good folks, get into their confidence, and betray their secrets as you would do!'

" And then from all parts of the cellar there came cries for the name of this young man, and you can



“ THE OTHERS HELD HIM DOWN AND BRANDED HIM WITH A HOT IRON ”

imagine my feelings, Antonin, when Raymond's name was read out from the bottom of the letter. I had had my suspicions about him, I confess ; I had seen him with this scoundrel ; I had wondered how he made all the money that he spends ; but never mind about that, we will talk about it some other time. Let me get on with my story of the spy. Mauglas's insolent cynicism had made me afraid of some tragic ending. Suddenly, after a long consultation between Deamoff and the other judges, he was seized and flung down on the table. I heard him gasp out, ' You are not going to slaughter me like a pig, are you ? ' But they did n't do that. They had brought him there to mark him, and that is what they did. Several of them got trumpets—the cellar, I was told, was often used for band practice—and stood round the table, and while they blew them to drown his cries, the others held him down and branded him with a hot iron right in the middle of his forehead with a huge fly, and then rubbed some green stuff into it ; but before that was done, I had put my fingers into my ears and got out of the cellar as quickly as I could. Some of them who saw it all told me about it afterwards.

“ Well, dear Tonin, I promised you some news, and I think I 've given you some, but I have n't done yet. For instance, there is your little sister Dina, whom I meet very often, looking like a dear little schoolgirl, going to and from the offices, with her little satchel under her arm. The interruption of her Cinderella romance has not made much difference to her, for her Prince Charming, although she has not seen him again, is better, and as soon as he could be moved was taken away to the Engadine by his father, who was almost as ill as he was. So you see to this extent, at least,

her faith in her medals has been justified, although Pierre Izoard calls it idolatry. As it happened, this idolatry might be of some use to him just now, because they seem to be getting tired of him and his theories of '48 at the Chamber, and his place there is in danger. He talks about retiring to Morangis and turning hermit. He says that he 's quite prepared to be satisfied with his own company, poor old man, but there was never anyone who loved to talk to other people more than he does, or who would be more alone if he were left to himself.

“ And then there 's Genevieve. I think she is really his greatest trouble, for somehow or other she is slipping away from him. A short time ago he proposed a marriage for her, but she refused it at once. It appears that she considers herself married already to someone who is unable to marry her. I cannot help thinking that there is something terrible behind all this ; that she and this other, whoever he is, are living a life of lies and false pretences, and that, you know, can only end in catastrophe. You, of course, my dear boy, living as far away from us all as you do, cannot know anything of the romance to which I allude, but still you know M'sieu' Izoard just as well as I do. What do you think would happen if he knew that every day after lunch at Morangis Genevieve flies to Paris and does not come back again until lunch-time the next day ? It would be terrible. I do not dare even to think of it, and yet sometimes when I am with him, and see his eyes lighting up and looking fierce, and those thick eyebrows of his coming together, I cannot help thinking that he suspects something. I should like to warn Genevieve, but I cannot, because she always seems to avoid me for some reason or other.

“ Of course I sometimes go and see dear old Mamma Eudeline, who is always to be found as usual sitting at her counter with her spectacles on and her nose in one of her old romances, and I have learned from her something else which disturbs me a good deal. It seems that Raymond has taken to writing and makes so much money that he pays all the expenses of the family without anything at all being taken from you. There’s one thing, however, in which he has not been able to replace you, and that is shutting up the shop at night. Dina has to do that now, and she breaks her nails over it, and every night, after she has put the shutters up, she comes in like a kitten in a passion.

“ Now, my dear boy, I think it only right to tell you that this sudden success of Raymond’s seems very extraordinary to me. I don’t know any literary men in France, but I know some in Russia and other places ; and I have never heard of a publisher giving to an unknown author, on the strength of an unpublished book, such large sums as Raymond is spending. I have made inquiries, too, at the Alcides’. Madame Alcide, you know, is the housekeeper of the building where his rooms are, and I find that he is living quite in style, that he gives dinners twice a week to a lot of young men who look to be very clever, as she says, but whose names have never been heard of. In his presence these people flatter him and call him ‘ the Master,’ and all that sort of thing, but when they are going down-stairs afterwards they say different things. She heard one of them say once that the dinners must cost a good deal, and no one knows where the money comes from. I’m afraid that’s only too true. He is writing a book, but it has not appeared yet. The manuscript is lying on his table from morning to night, and never seems

to get on. He does n't give any lessons; he has no employment anywhere—what is one to think?

“I'm afraid you will think it very horrid of me writing in this way, but still I know you will take it in good part, and pardon me because of my friendship for you all. Another thing, adventures like that Mauglas affair are rather calculated to upset one. Just one more line. Do you meet any of the Russian refugees now as you used to, and if so, what do they think of Lupniak's arrest? One can judge so much of these things from a distance.

“Yours,

“SOPHIE C.”

“*To Sophie Castagnozoff, Paris:*

“Ah, Mam'selle Sophie, if you only knew how much sorrow that letter of yours caused me!—sorrow that will last, which strikes me and wounds me from a long way off, and which I have really felt for a long time, for I've always thought that you were unjust towards my brother, and now I know that you have gone so far as to suppose or, at least, to suspect that he is dishonest, that he—and yet you tell me you were glad to learn that Raymond Eudeline, winner of the Grand Prize in the General Assembly, Doctor of Laws and Licentiate in Letters, a man who could have been President of the association, if he had chosen, refused the offers, the disgraceful offers, of the miserable spy and traitor, Mauglas!

“I tell you that I cried with anger at that passage in your letter. I wept with pity and shame at the lines which you took pleasure in writing. No, Mam'selle, you do not know my brother, you have never known him. If I could tell you the sacrifices that he has made for

us, sacrifices of his ambition and of his love, you would look upon him as a hero. But he never boasts, and yet people as good as you and Père Izoard have thought fit to reproach him all these years with being unequal to his task, with being unable to support the family ! Whose fault is it, if Latin and Greek and philosophy, which are the only tools he has in his hands, are not useful for that sort of work ? How can one become an advocate, a professor, a deputy, or anything of that sort, all at once, when one has to live and support a whole family ? Fortunately, he has had literary talent ever since he was a boy—you remember that great effort of his at the General Assembly ;—it is because of this that one of the first publishers in Paris, just on the strength of the plan of the novel, a study of social life to-day in Paris, has advanced him enough to take my place as regards mamma and Dina. If anybody asks you again where the money comes from you can tell him this, and some day, when the book is published, and the immense success that it must have, has repaid the publisher, all these calumnies will be silenced.

“ And now, my dear Sophie, I shall have to leave off because I have got to go to work. Do not, I beg of you, think any more evil of Raymond, and never let the name of Mauglas be associated with his in your mind. If you only knew how your letter has seemed to me like a million of pins pricking in my head every time that I think of my brother, I am sure you would have never written it.

“ Ever yours,

“ ANTONIN E.”



CHAPTER XX

A FRENCH FAMILY

IT was a dull foggy morning at the Calais pier terminus. In fact, the fog was as thick as though the steamer had brought it over from England. Antonin Eudeline, who had just come off the boat, was buying a lot of newspapers at the stall, not so much to read for the sake of the news in them, but just to occupy his thoughts somehow on the journey to Paris, for there were many things troubling him, even outside the business responsibilities which weighed so heavily on his young shoulders. Worst of all, the drawing for the conscription was coming very near now.

"Will you let me draw for you? I have always been lucky at that sort of thing," his hearty old employer had written to him, but Tonin had refused, as he preferred to try his luck himself. He also wanted to try and settle for himself on the spot that disquieting problem which Sophie had put so directly to him. He knew now that publishers do not often make advances on the work of an unknown author, and if this were so, where was Raymond getting the money which he was spending on himself and the family? By the hideous trade of Mauglas? No, that was impossible. Only the fantastic imagination of this Russian girl could

picture such a thing. But even without falling as low as this, was it not possible that Raymond might have taken money from this rich woman, this Minister's wife, whose gloves and parasol he had one day shown him? Much as he had always admired his brother, he had felt troubled and ashamed that day.

And then he was thinking also of what Casta had said about his dear Tantine, hopelessly in love with a man who could n't marry her. Who was this man, and how had he managed to throw such an evil spell over her? Yes, certainly, he would want newspapers or something to make him think of other things, during the journey. As he paid for them with the remainder of the pence that he had, the woman at the stall nodded towards a little group of travellers, in the midst of which he recognised the spectacles and short beard of the famous novelist Hercher, whose experiences in England had been entertaining Paris for the last fortnight.

Tonin knew him by sight, and edged near enough to the group to hear what he was saying aloud to the rest. "Yes," he said, "here is another of them, another new book, another new author. Everybody writes in France nowadays, everyone seems to be the author of either a book or a play. No one reads except us old hands, perhaps, and we go back sometimes to try and see what the world was like when we were boys. These young fellows only read their own books and recite passages from them and think themselves little gods while they're doing it."

"But surely," said another voice, "they're not all like that. There must be some real talent among these new men; they can't all be either fools or frauds."

"Talent, my dear sir?" said Hercher, turning

towards the little artisan-looking man in the soft hat who had said this, with the politeness of a man who is sufficiently well known to belong, in a certain sense, to the public. "There is no doubt in my mind that they all have talent. For instance, this book that I have in my hand, and which I have not even opened yet, I'm quite certain that there's talent in it, genius, perhaps, but then, even if there were, who is going to read it?"

"But," protested Antonin, humbly, "why should not people read the works of this new author? People still read a great deal in France. For instance, M'sieu' Hercher's own books are sold by the hundred thousand, and—and——"

The great writer grinned between his iron-grey beard and moustache and said :

"Well, yes, my books sell, as a matter of fact, more than a hundred thousand, but what is that? In comparison with the success that some books have in England, it's a mere piece of child's play. Give me a country where you can have your three hundred and fifty thousand readers—yes, my dear sir, three, four hundred thousand who read stories and don't write them——"

He had got this far when there sounded from the platform the cry, "Passengers for Paris!"

Before Antonin moved away he looked mechanically at the book which Hercher had just thrown down on the bookstall as he turned away. There was just time for him to see the title and the name, to stifle a cry of surprise and triumph, and to get into the carriage carrying the only two copies that there were in the station, and for the matter of that in the town of Calais, of the romance by Raymond Eudeline, on the cover of which stood the title :



“ IN HIS OWN THIRD-CLASS COMPARTMENT THERE WAS NOBODY WHO COULD UNDERSTAND.”

A FRENCH FAMILY

A ROMANCE FOUNDED ON FACT

Fourth Edition

What was Hercher saying about people not reading new authors? Here was a book that had just been put on sale and was already in its fourth edition. What would it be in another week? Ah! what a triumph it would have been if Tonin, instead of taking a third-class ticket, had only had the courage to get into a first-class compartment, with this book in his hand, to sit down in front of Hercher, and say to him:

“Do you see this book? Well, it is written by my elder brother, and I can tell you that it, at least, is being sold and read.”

But in his own third-class compartment there was nobody who could understand the fraternal enthusiasm with which he was almost bursting, much less the abstruse language and involved phrases which he attempted to read out. It was a long, mournful story, told in four hundred pages, of a too devoted son ascending his Calvary, there to be crucified for the sake of his family—one of those narrow-minded, ignorant, unappreciative families of which, according to the author, as everyone knows, France has the monopoly. It so happened also that the young martyr had the blue eyes and curly golden locks of Raymond himself, and at the end of the book he died of grief and consumption, having sacrificed everything, even the love of his life, to his family.

Altogether, the poor fellow was very much discouraged with the result of his attempts to make his thick-headed fellow-travellers understand how great a genius

he had for a brother. It was only in Paris, in that rarefied atmosphere full of fire and intelligence, that one could find true appreciation for it.

He tried to get to the sign of the Wonderful Lamp in time to shut the shop up for his mother, but the crowd of vehicles in the street was so great that he got there too late, for the shutters were already up, and only a triangle of light was visible over the doorway. On the way, as was usual with him after his journeys to London, he noticed how much smaller the people in the streets looked and how much higher the houses seemed than they did in London, and yet, for all that, how much more noisy and feverish the life of Paris seemed than the life of that other city, twice the size and three times as populous.

When he went in he found his mother sitting opposite to her old friend on the other side of the counter, still repeating the same refrain :

“ Ah, M'sieu' Izoard ! ”

To which the other replied in accents even more mournful :

“ Ah, Madame Eudeline ! ”

Of course, when he went in there was an outburst of delight, but Tonin travelled a great deal, and they were more or less accustomed to his comings and goings. It was he who felt the real happiness of his return to those he loved. When his mother had pressed him to her old heart, and when Dina, who was just clearing the table in the back parlour, had embraced her favourite brother, he said inquiringly :

“ Well, is he happy, Raymond ? He has succeeded after all, you see—eh—of course you 've seen his book ? ”

“ Yes, it 's been out two days,” said his mother

quickly, as though she would have liked to prevent anything else being said on the subject. Dina had vanished into the parlour again, where she was invisible, but could be heard. "If you want to see someone who is not happy," growled Pierre Izoard, bracing himself up on his short legs, "look at me. Do you know what they 've done to me—yes, to me? Well, my boy, at the end of the session I 'm going to take my retirement. It seems that there are too many Republicans at the Palais-Bourbon."

His sister called to him from the parlour :

"Your dinner 's ready, Tonin !" and then, when he had sat down and she was waiting on him, she told him about the misfortune which had fallen upon M'sieu' Izoard. It had only happened that day. He had just learned that he was to be retired, he, the man who was so well known, so well loved by all, to whom Marc Javel and Gambetta and so many others had promised that this should never happen, that the Republic could no more do without its old servant than the Empire could. He had come to believe this honestly, and then, without warning, this blow had fallen. He had not uttered a word of complaint or reproach. He had just gone to his work as usual, but with trembling hands and eyes blinking under his heavy brow, but before the end of the sitting he had risen, saying to his neighbour :

"I don't feel very well to-day. I seem to want some fresh air. I think I shall go back to Morangis."

Now, as a rule, his duties at the Chamber kept him very late at night, and he believed that, while he was sleeping in his official apartments at Palais-Bourbon, Genevieve slept at Morangis with the old housekeeper. But imagine his feelings, his thoughts, when he learned

gradually, and outwardly taking everything as a matter of course, that for some months past Genevieve had neither dined nor slept at Morangis, except sometimes on a Sunday when she knew that her father would be there. "Where had she been all this time? Where did she go? To Sophie's, no doubt." It was with this thought in his mind that the poor old man had come, full of sorrow and nameless fears, to Madame Eudeline, to unburden his mind to her. Madame Eudeline thought so too, and for more than an hour he had been sitting there feeding himself with this hope.

"But it is not true. Mamma knows that it is not," murmured Antonin, with his mouth full. "Genevieve and Sophie have not seen each other for a long time; they're not even friends, now, since that plan about the hospital at Calcutta fell to the ground. Don't you know the cause of all this, Dina? What is this that they are saying about some intrigue which Tantine is supposed to have been carrying on for some months?"

In spite of the signs which his sister kept making to him, Tonin kept on, speaking louder and louder. For him, Genevieve was a sort of consecrated being over whom Raymond himself might, perhaps, have certain rights, but no one else, and the idea that another man had dared to dream of such a sacrilege was almost impossible. Besides, what was Raymond thinking about, too, allowing Genevieve to sacrifice herself to make anyone else happy? This literature must have turned his head.

"Oh yes, this literature!" said Dina, taking up the copy of the book which Antonin had thrown upon the bed. "I know I'm very glad that my Claudius never wanted to write or mix himself up with these young brigands that Raymond is so friendly with."

Antonin took her little hands between his two big, rough ones, and said :

“ Ah yes, that is too bad of me. I have never asked you any news about him. Where is he? how is he getting on? ”

“ Oh, he ’s still in the Engadine, ” she replied. “ He ’s not allowed to talk or to write. He never goes out, and he is kept in the room day and night with the windows open to the cold air. But that does n’t matter. I ’m quite sure that he ’ll live and get better. I have faith in our protectors. ”

As she said this, she pointed towards the little gilded plaster image of Notre Dame de Fourvières which stood on the shelf above the bed behind the screen.

“ But the good lady looks a bit damaged ! ” said Tonin, looking round.

Dina blushed up to her hair, but she knew that there was no malice in what her brother said, and replied good-humouredly :

“ Oh yes, it was when I came home last night. I was very angry, and I threw my satchel upon the bed in such a fury that I knocked down the image and the medals and everything. It was a perfect miracle that it was n’t broken. ”

“ But what were you angry about ? ” asked Tonin, smiling. “ I thought that was all over now, and that you were never going to fall into any more passions. ”

“ Well, yes, I do what I can ; but you know there are times—as a matter of fact I had been reading a book which made me very angry. ”

“ A book ? ” asked Tonin, rather anxiously.

Just then Izoard came in from the shop, saying in his gruff voice :

“ Funny thing, all the same, this good Virgin who

can make a man live without lungs, and yet can't preserve a young miss from fits of anger which are her only fault ! ”

Then the old man suddenly picked her up in his arms and whispered in her ear :

“ But never mind ! that does n't prevent you from being the best little girl in the world, and, after all, you, with your gods and goddesses, have more philosophy than my master Proudhon himself.”

Then he made a sign to Tonin to take his hat, and said to Madame Eudeline in a voice which he vainly tried to keep firm :

“ Your son will come along a little way with me, mamma ; we have something to say to each other. You will see him again later on.”

As soon as they were alone together on the Quai, the old man asked him if it was true, as Madame Eudeline had said, that he was still friendly with Sophie and had corresponded with her, and Antonin told him at once that this was so.

“ Very well, then, Tonin,” said Izoard, “ tell me, I implore you, everything that you know about my daughter. Don't be afraid to speak, because, however calm I may seem, I am almost dying of the suspense of this ignorance. Do you believe, as your mother does, that Genevieve has taken up her studies with Casta again in order to qualify herself as an assistant in one of the hospitals ? ”

“ But, M'sieu' Izoard, I don't believe it. I am certain——”

By the sudden trembling of the old man's hand clasped upon his as he said this, Tonin understood that it was necessary to lie to him, that it was a matter of life and death with the poor old fellow, and perhaps

also with his daughter, and so he lied. He had learned from Mam'selle Sophie's letters sent to him in England that, after a good deal of hesitation, Genevieve had decided definitely to throw herself into Casta's work among the children ; that she visited with her, attended the consultations, and worked in the dispensary. And further, that she usually worked so late that Casta kept her to sleep with her.

" Ah yes, yes, that 's right, I thought that was it," said the old stenographer, from whose heart every word of Tonin's lifted a weight which had been crushing it for hours.

There were several things he had not been able to understand before, which looked quite natural now. For instance, he saw why Genevieve had claimed the thirty thousand francs of her fortune, and more recently the five thousand which Antonin had repaid. These thirty-five thousand francs had gone to help Sophie's work, for, although she was rich herself, she never refused money for her darling project.

" But still, how is it that Genevieve has never told me anything about it ? "

His mind kept on going back mechanically to that. He could not understand how there could be such a long silence between two souls as intimate as theirs were. For months he had believed his daughter to be sleeping peacefully under the blue slates and tall plane-trees at Morangis, and instead of that she had been wandering about the slums of Paris and keeping watch by pauper sick-beds. Certainly, it was a little hard to forgive her for such a deception as this.

" But, M'sieu' Izoard, I have no doubt that Tantine did n't want to make you anxious about her——"

" Ah, my boy, that 's all very well, but if you knew

what a blow it was to me when I went back there, and that old woman told me, half laughing in my face, that my daughter never had dinner at home, and very seldom slept there. If she had wanted to spare her old father she might—she had better—have told me everything. No, it is bad enough to lose a child who has grown up beside you, even when she marries, but when you don't know what has become of her, when you don't know but what she has fallen into the hands of one of these fine fellows, with their poetical phrases and nicely waxed moustaches—yes, that is the agony of agonies, and I can tell you that if I had not had your mother to go to when this thing first came upon me, and if she and Dina had not consoled me and reassured me as they have done, I know someone who would have made a fine, big hole in the Seine by this time."

They stopped before the Chamber just as the clocks of Saint-Clotilde and the Ministry of War were striking twelve. Izoard took him into his own office, where a wood fire was dying in the grate. He threw a few sticks and a log on it, and then he turned to Tonin and said abruptly :

" You have read your brother's book, I suppose ? "

As he said this he took it out of a drawer of his desk and threw it down on a table.

" Yes," said Tonin, " I have read it, but not very carefully, I 'm afraid, yet."

" And Dina has not said anything to you about it ? "

" No, M'sieu' Izoard."

" So much the worse, then, for she might have saved me the pain of telling you what I think about it. This book is an infamy."

“ Oh, M'sieu' Izoard ! ”

“ It seems to me a question whether your brother was sane when he wrote it. Come here and tell me whether he is a fool or a knave, or whether we are all monsters.”

Tonin had dimly seen something like this, as through a thick veil, but in the goodness of his heart and his loyalty to his brother he would have given anything rather than hear someone else say these terrible words to him :

“ You know, of course, that it is his own story which the young gentleman is telling,” Izoard went on, holding the book up under the lamp-shade, “ and therefore his story must also be ours. But he has painted himself as a sort of curled and scented Christ, a Christ martyred by his own family,—and then look at the hideous heads that he has put upon us, his executioners ! You know those horrible heads of nondescript beasts that grin at you round the tower of an old church—well, there we are, that is his family ! He has not made his mother out quite so bad, he only accuses her of idiocy, of blind and ignorant tenderness, but if he has spared his mother, it was only to fall the more fiercely on me.”

“ Oh, M'sieu' Izoard, do you mean to say that he has dared to ? ”

“ If he has dared to ! Who else can this ridiculous old Bourdelais be, this materialistic doctor, proscribed in '52, who hated the Cæsars so much that he taught his daughter Latin from Suetonius ? There, if you doubt the resemblance, read that passage, and you will find Pierre Izoard painted to the life.”

“ But, M'sieu' Izoard,” stammered the other when he had made a pretence of reading the passage which

the old man had pointed to, "perhaps that was only because it was necessary in the novel. I have heard him say that a novel is a—a—tra—travesty of life."

"That may be, little man," said the other, still turning over the pages of the "realistic" novel, "but I think rather that the novelist is the historian of little people, of the people who have no history, and he has no more right to be an impostor or a caricaturist than anyone else. Now, just look here on page 104, and tell me why Raymond, to whom you have never done anything but good, should have put you into the skin of a certain Cousin Furbice, a low-minded hypocrite who pretends to stammer in order to give himself time to make up his lies? Just read that passage out loud and you'll see what I mean."

Antonin tried to repeat aloud a few of the phrases in which his stammering was imitated.

"No, I can't go on," he said, looking up with a smile, but with a big tear resting in the corner of his broad nose and cheek like a drop of water in a hole in a rock.

For a moment they looked at each other, drying their eyes in silence, and then Izoard threw the book into his desk, locked it up, and growled :

"By heavens, if that is what they call a realistic novel, all I can say is that it is the sort of thing to poison the lives of good people and to cut one's heart in two!"

But Tonin made a heroic gesture, and said :

"Still, it does n't very much matter if he is making fun of me as long as his book sells well and earns him plenty of money."

"This book! Plenty of money! Not a centime!"

"But surely you don't understand, M'sieu' Izoard."

He insisted that this must be so ; there were the figures—four editions in four days.

But the old man laughed under his beard. What of that ? There were only about a hundred copies in each edition, and they were practically all still in the book-shops. Oh yes, he had taken the trouble to find all that out.

“ But then, how—how—how could he have got the money that he spent on himself—on mamma ? ”

The words would n't come out, and he moved about on his seat, stammering and sobbing for several moments; and then those horrible suspicions which Sophie had put into his mind rose up again, and drove him to tell them to his friend. Since Lupniak's trial Casta had not tried to hide from him that she believed Raymond to be the Judas.

“ But, M'sieu' Izoard, you cannot believe that possible, can you, with his refinement, with his education, that my brother could consent to gain his living in such a shameful way ? ”

“ And Mauglas ? ” said the old man quietly ; “ a writer, an artist, a man of real talent ? Do you think that mere intelligence will keep you safe from everything ? ”

Almost beside himself with anger, poor Antonin brought his fist down on the desk with a bang that very nearly put the lamp out and cried :

“ But Mauglas was not a son of Victor Eudeline, M'sieu' Izoard ! ”

Without replying, the old man threw on his cape and said :

“ It 's suffocating in here, let us go and take a stroll outside.”

When they were outside he went on more quietly :

"You must remember, my lad, that with your brother his pride stands above all things, and when your father left him this right of the First-born, and this title of Head of the Family, with all its privileges, he did not think that he would allow this pride to carry him to the point of madness. As it is, Raymond has taken it so seriously in one sense that he has not been able even to forgive you for having supported the family all this time, and he was ready to do everything in the world—remember, I say everything—in order to put an end to such a humiliating situation. *Caspi!* you are not the first younger son who has taken the first place in the family. Take Napoleon, for instance. Look what he did for his people, made all his brothers kings and married his sisters to princes; but if Raymond had been in the place of Joseph Bonaparte he would probably have hated Napoleon. And now, if you really wish to have my candid opinion, I say that the man who could write this villainous book, dictated as it has been by his wounded pride, is capable, under the same influence, of every other abomination that we can suspect him of."

A strangled sob sounded in the darkness.

"No, no; it is n't possible. I can't believe it."

"Well, as for me, I am sorry to say that I believe everything," said the old man, pressing Tonin's arm to him. "You remember that story I've often told you about Lavarande, the man who was once my friend and who introduced me to the Barbes Club? Well, you know, although he was trusted by everybody, loved by everybody, he turned traitor and confessed his guilt. Do you know what he did it for, why he sold his friends and comrades to the police? It was just because he had gone mad with love over a little

woman, the wife of a watchmaker who lived in his street, and she wanted jewellery and dresses and that sort of thing, and as he could n't get them for her in any other way, he got them in that way. Who knows but that unfortunate brother of yours has fallen like him into the clutches of some adventuress ? ”

Antonin shuddered at these last words, which seemed to be the only ones he had heard.

“ A woman, yes,” he murmured, “ it may be that he has a wife.”

“ Poor little fellow, you are just like what I was once at Morangis ; and then, when I was thinking about Genevieve, it came to me that there might be a man in all this. It is a horrible thing to come to the end of all your beliefs, to believe in nothing that has been dearest and holiest to you. I have loved the Republic as a mother, adored it as a country, and to-day I see that it is nothing but a shop, a society for mutual exploitation, and now it has dismissed me, its old servant who has grown up with it;—and look at me now, still in my full strength, and yet useless, sent into retirement. And this is the worst part of all—all my beliefs and faiths destroyed, all my ideas of life and men upset ! My daughter gone away, my place lost—what is there left for me in life ? The ideas of this generation are separated from mine by thousands of leagues. Three parts of my time I don't understand a word of what I read. Wherever I look about me it seems as dark and cold as it is here. Ah, my poor little Tonin ! ”



CHAPTER XXI

THE FIFTH ARROW

“**C**LEAR my table and leave us.”

The voice of the Minister for Foreign Affairs was as nervous and jerky as the gesture with which he spoke. Young M. Wilkie, whose presence had been suddenly requested by his patron, helped the attendant to do as he was told, and as soon as the flowers and other pretty trifles which encumbered the Minister's desk had been removed, and the man had left them, Wilkie said to his step-father :

“ Then Colonel Moulton will be here to lunch to-day. Is the pretty little Queen of the Dwarfs coming too ? ”

“ Yes. There 'll be some other people too ; Marc Javel and his wife and niece, the two daughters of the English Ambassador, and Mrs. Harris, that pretty American. Now you can imagine how pleasant I found that little scene with your mother this morning ! ”

The Minister took several short, jerky, little strides up and down the room. Then he stopped in front of a window which looked out into the garden, and stood there watching the falling snow and, as it were, jerking his words over his shoulder : “ This woman is mad,

perfectly mad ! But still, if she wants to make any scandal, her letters to this young Raymond Eudeline would be quite enough to cover her with shame and ridicule in the eyes of all Paris."

And then, as it were, edging his words in between the ministerial phrases, Wilkie said with a snigger :

" Oh, she 'll talk, she 'll talk, but she won't do anything."

" That 's all very well, but this flight of hers is already a scandal, for she 's gone, has n't she ? In the sight of the whole world she has left the house of her husband and the home of her children ! "

In his excitement the little clown had become the orator. He turned round as though to face his audience, tapping the fingers of one hand on the palm of the other as though he were beating time on the rail of the tribune, punctuating his loud-sounding phrases, " the family," " her children," " her duties as wife and mother," and so on.

" Just look at this, sir ! " said Wilkie, putting a blue-covered pamphlet on the desk. The cover was decorated with a cross under which was the title :

" Record of Work among the Sick Children of Paris, under the Direction of Doctor Castagnozoff."

And under this was the text :

" Suffer little children to come unto Me."

" If my mother has gone," he went on in reply to the Minister's mute interrogation, " that is where she is, with this doctor, Sophie Castagnozoff, a crack-brained Russian girl who is going about physicking all the sick gutter-brats in Paris. This Raymond Eudeline is pretty sly, about as sly as that charming little sister of his. When he wanted to get rid of his fashionable admirer he was clever enough to give a humani-

tarian turn to this impressionable, religious nature of hers. As for my mother going through with the business, that depends on whether she can take Florence with her. I don't believe she 'll go alone."

Valfon stopped turning over the leaves of the pamphlet and said, looking sideways at him :

"Take Florence with her ; what for ? She is n't tired of life. In fact, I can't see why on earth your mother should. What has put this foolery into her head ? Do you know anything about it ? "

"No, I've heard nothing more. Mauglas might be able to tell us, for I have had all that I know from him. Since you made it too hot for him at the Prefectures he has quite gone into private life, and he seems to have had some sort of adventure or experience that has pretty well taken all the stiffening out of him. For instance, he has a black silk skull-cap which comes right down to his eyebrows, and he wears this constantly indoors and out; and then, in order to make the change complete, he has given up writing on ancient dances, and has just published a book of poems, *Bells and Chimes*, and it's a marvel. You ought to hear him say : ' I write for fame ; I am a spy to find bread for my parents.' You know this extraordinary fellow has a father and a mother, whom he supports with great devotion—' Head of the Family,' you know, as we used to call Raymond Eudeline at Louis le Grand. He was very proud of it, and used to impress the mothers when they saw him in the reception-room. Confound the fellow, I 'll make him pay for the dirty trick he's played us. I suppose my mother tired him at last. Gave him too much Schumann and too much piano. By the way, when he got rid of her by getting her into this woman doctor's dispensary, he started the

same game with a very jolly girl, the daughter of that old fool who is Chief of Reporters in the Chamber. Old Izoard would cut up pretty rough, I should think, if he knew that his daughter was kicking up her heels like that, and I think I know someone that I can get to tell him."

"Yes, but what about this morning?" said Valfon, anxiously twitching at his now drooping moustache. "Neither your mother nor your sister, not a single woman to preside opposite to me at lunch! What the deuce is to be done?"

"If you like, I could try once more to get into Florence's room," suggested Wilkie, timidly.

"Oh no; you must n't do that!" exclaimed Valfon quickly. "You know what sort of a girl she is. She is pretending to be ill. She won't receive anyone, and she won't receive you."

Wilkie's mean little features sharpened as an idea struck him, and he said with a grin:

"I'll tell you what I can do. Suppose I were to go to the Ministry of Marine and tell some yarn to Jeannine Briant. They're great friends, you know. She'd come at once, and she might be able to get her out of her shell somehow."

"The very thing!" said Valfon; "but you'll have to be quick about it."

Less than an hour afterwards, Mam'selle Jeannine, in morning dress, tailor-made costume, and big Gainsborough hat with ostrich plumes, scratched at the door of Florence's rooms with the stone in one of her rings. The maid opened it a little and said:

"I am sorry, Mam'selle, but if you only knew——"

Jeannine pushed the door open and went in. She sent the maid away and went towards the big white

bed where she expected to find Florence lying in one of those fits of idleness which sometimes kept her in bed for the whole day, in careless forgetfulness of the outside world, behind her drawn curtains.

"But where are you, Florence?" she asked as she stopped stupefied beside the empty bed from which the clothes had been thrown back. Then from her dressing-room came the voice of her friend, slow and weak and mournful:

"Is that you, Jean? Are you alone? Come to the door and let me speak to you."

Jeannine went towards the door saying:

"But what is all this about? They say that your mother has gone away. Open the door, Florence, and let me see."

"If you saw me you would understand everything. But I don't want——"

All of a sudden, Jeannine remembered Florence's broken engagement to Claudius Jacquand.

"You unhappy girl, what have you done? Open the door, open it quick!"

She pushed at the door, which yielded almost immediately, and saw before her something that looked like a choir-boy, pale and trembling, with a little round, close-cropped head and a figure wrapped in a Carmelite robe tied at the waist with a cord.

"Oh, my poor Flo-flo! Oh, your lovely hair!"

The first effect of the apparition was to make her want to laugh and cry at the same time, so strangely did this little head, with its badly cut hair and small regular features, remind her of Wilkie. Florence stood stock-still, looking down at the carpet, and murmured:

"You see I've cut it all off. I did it in a rage



"ALL MY HAIR LYING THERE ON THE FLOOR."

of disappointment, but I had n't the courage to do the rest. I could n't do what I meant to do."

And then she whispered as though she were talking to herself :

" No one will be able to enjoy any triumph in hearing people say about the girl he jilted, ' There 's the finest head of hair in Paris.' "

Jeannine uttered a cry of horror.

" Ah, my God ! Oh, you poor girl ! Is that really so. Have you done it for that ? "

Jeannine had taken poor Florence in her arms and was seated beside the distracted girl on a little low bed. This had been slept in every night by Mme. Valfon until her husband had denounced her to her unhappy daughter.

" My poor mother, ever since she met this Sophie Casta, the Russian doctor, does n't seem able to think about anything but those sick children. She is out constantly. Her house, her daughter, are nothing to her now. Her whole life is taken up in consultations and conferences.

" Ah, poor mamma ! never shall I forget her coming back and finding me here, half dead upon my bed with my cropped head, and all my hair lying there on the floor beside me ! "

" Ah, what a lovely, long, black switch that would make ! "

" And now what is going to happen ? what is happening ? what is going to become of us all ? Has my mother really gone away ? Is she going to India with this Russian doctress ? Perhaps I might go with her and join in this good work, but there, I 'm no good for anything now. I don't love anything, I don't believe in anything, and then, just look at me. Where

could I go with this monkey's head of mine? where could I go and hide my ugliness, this ugliness that I have made as a punishment for my shame?"

"Your ugliness—do you mean to say that you have made yourself ugly?" exclaimed Jeannine, taking the pretty little cropped head between her hands, and laughing in her face. "Well, I can tell that, as far as I'm concerned, you look perfectly charming like this. You remind me of that dear little Indian prince that came last year, you know, the son of the Begum of Oude."

Florence's big, mournful eyes filled with tears again at this.

"No, no, don't say that; it's horrible!"

"But why horrible, dear?"

"Because I wanted to punish myself, to lose this beauty which has been of so little use, and I have not succeeded. Ah, my God!"

As long as she lived Jeannine never forgot the terrible energy with which this usually lymphatic girl hammered these words, as it seemed, into her very soul. But the next moment this volatile little Parisienne, light and easily swayed as one of the plumes of her own hat, had reverted to her promise to Wilkie to get his sister to come down to luncheon, and so, after a little silence, she said persuasively:

"Listen, Flo-flo! Of course, I may be mistaken, but I think there is a very easy way of finding out whether you have disfigured yourself or not. There are some people coming to see you this morning. Now suppose you were just to pluck up courage and dress yourself and go down to luncheon. You would see instantly in everybody's eyes what the real truth is."

Florence thought for a moment in silence ; then she jumped up and faced her and said :

“ Take care what you ’re saying, Jeannine ! I should like nothing better than to go down to lunch, to try and live an hour or two of natural life. But, remember this; if I find that I have n’t done it, if I see that he can still take any pride in this beauty which he has humiliated, I swear to you that I will finish what I have begun, and the next time I won’t fail.”

Jeannine was about to reply when Florence stopped her with a motion of her little, plump, almost oriental, hand.

“ There is just one detail, but it is important. Out of compliment to Colonel Moulton and these young English ladies, hats will be worn at lunch. I shall not wear a hat myself. I shall lunch in my hair, or what there is left of it. I want people to see it.”

When she entered the reception-room on Valfon’s arm there was a general, half-suppressed cry of admiration for the pretty, little boyish-looking head held so erectly on her round white neck and lovely shoulders. Her eyes were blazing with a feverish fire, and her mouth was eloquent of weariness. As they sat down she made up a little story about the awkwardness of her maid, who had upset a lamp and burnt all her hair while she was curling it. There was n’t a word about her mother’s going away ; but, for all that, there was not one of the guests who did not know the story and who did not betray his or her stifled curiosity by little furtive looks.

After the luncheon, which was both long and tire-some, the guests went up-stairs into the Minister’s

private room to see the collection of curiosities which Colonel Moulton, a famous African traveller, had brought from the Dark Continent for his friend Valfon whom he had known years before, when he was consul at Bordeaux, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs was still running his circus. Perhaps the greatest curiosity of all was the little Queen of the Dwarfs, a tiny little thing who had been found too small to sit at table, a pygmy princess who had fallen in love with the big white slayer of wild beasts and had fled from her kingdom with him. Of course, there were all sorts of other things, bows and arrows, spears and clubs, necklaces of painted stone, and all that sort of thing ; but among them was a curious-looking roll of palm leaves. Wilkie was just beginning to open this to see what was inside, when the Englishman said quickly :

“ Take care what you ’re doing there, M’sieu Wilkie; those are rather dangerous.”

He took the packet from him, opened it very carefully, and took out five long slender darts, with a ball of ivory at one end and at the other a sharp point of poisoned iron, covered with a little sheath. No one, not even Stanley or Moulton himself, knew the nature of this poison, which was more deadly and penetrating than curari itself. Not even the little Queen of the Pygmies herself knew, but she always kept religiously locked up in a box a quiver full of these darts, of which the slightest prick meant death—and what a death ! In five minutes the whole body was swollen up like that of a leper and the face hideous beyond recognition.

“ Well, Valfon,” said the new Minister of Marine to his colleague, who was standing moodily in front of the fire drawing clouds of smoke from his cigar, “ I don’t think politics would be a very nice profession in



" SHE ENTERED THE ROOM ON VALFON'S ARM."

that country. If anybody wanted your portfolio, all he would have to do would be to send you one of those arrows so that you could prick your finger with it, or get someone to prick it for you."

Wilkie heard the remark and said with his mean little snigger :

" But, M'sieu le Ministre, we have equivalents for them in our own society. A skilfully pointed calumny, one of those anonymous letters which you can get manufactured by the hundred at recognised establishments—give me the use of these and I will undertake to poison the healthiest, the most powerful persons so far that in a very short time they shall only be fit to be patients of the Hospital of St. Louis."

" Well, my dear Valfon," said Colonel Moulton, laying the five arrows on the mantelpiece after he had seen that the points were all properly protected, " here you have five specimens of the anonymous letters of Central Africa, which I hope you will never allow to get into circulation. As soon as you possibly can, put them up out of reach on the wall of your billiard-room, and see that no one touches them."

" Duperron will see to that," said the Minister, nodding towards his man-servant who was poking the fire. " Duperron, do you hear that? As soon as we have gone—but no, I think I would rather see it done myself. Wait until I have come back from the Élysée."

They were to be there at four o'clock with the Colonel and the little Queen of the Dwarfs whom the President desired to see. When they returned to the drawing-room, Valfon went up to Florence and said, under cover of the laughter and conversation :

" Then you are not going with us to the Élysée? "

Without speaking, without even looking at him, she

shook her little cropped head in such a way as to convey a very emphatic negative. Then he turned to her friend and said :

“ Jeannine, I must leave her to you to-day. You will look after her, won't you ? And, please, don't leave her to herself.”

She replied readily :

“ Very well, I'll stop with her. It's snowing and freezing—just the sort of weather she likes. I'll send round for my uncle's mail-cart, and we'll go for a drive in the Bois. Fresh air and furs will be the best thing to do her good, I think.”

“ Thank you, my dear, thank you !” murmured Valfon, nervously.

He saw hanging over him one of those frightful calamities which not even the most powerful man in the state could avert.

The reception at the Élysée seemed terribly long and wearisome to him, and at last, unable to endure it any longer, he made an excuse to the President's wife and took his leave.

“ You will not forget to convey our compliments to your wife and Mam'selle Marques,” said the President as they exchanged their farewell salutations. His wife, his daughter ! The one gone, and the other, desperate at finding her mother a wanton and young Jacquand lost to her forever, he might perhaps never see again !

According to his usual custom, as soon as he got home Valfon went straight to his own room. The melancholy of this dull, snowy evening seemed to pervade the whole of the vast, empty, silent house. He rang violently, and when the man-servant came in he said to him :

“Light the lamps at once !” and then in the same abrupt tone he went on :

“Who has been in here since I went away ?”

“No one, Monsieur le Ministre, no one but myself. That is to say, unless someone has entered in that way.”

By “that way,” the dignified Duperron indicated the little door which led to the Minister’s private apartments. “And now I think of it, someone did come in that way, because, as I entered the room, I saw Mam’selle Florence go out.”

As he spoke, Valfon felt a chill as of death stealing over his heart.

“Very well,” he murmured, “that will do.” And then, as the man was leaving the room, he called him back. His eyes had fallen on the little bundle of poisoned arrows lying on the chimney-piece. “Duperron, how many of these arrows did the Colonel leave us, do you remember ; was it four or five ?”

His lips were so dry and trembled so much that he could hardly shape the words.

“There were five, Monsieur le Ministre, five, I’m quite sure of that,” replied Duperron, with the air of a man who is not accustomed to make mistakes.

Yes, it was only too true; there had been five, there were only four now. Who had taken the other one, and for what purpose had it been taken ?

Then Duperron asked again :

“Does Monsieur le Ministre wish these to be put up in the billiard-room now ?”

“No, no, never mind about that now ; that can wait. You can go.”

Truly, he needed a little time to prepare himself to meet the blow which he felt about to fall upon him.

To nerve himself to face the horror that was waiting for him on the other side of that little door, he held on to the chimney-piece with his shaking hands and looked at himself in the glass. Outside the snow was falling faster and faster; the world was getting colder and darker; in the mirror he saw the face of an old, old man with furrowed cheeks and haggard eyes and trembling chin. He had never seen himself look like that before.





CHAPTER XXII

EXPLANATIONS

ALMOST at the same time, tormented also, but by very different emotions, Antonin was making his way up the Boulevard Saint-Germain through a simoom of snow. He was going to see his brother, whom he had neither met, nor written to, since his return from London. He was going to have it out with him—to learn just how much truth or falsehood there was in all these accusations that people were making against him. Neither his mother nor his sister could tell him anything satisfactory or definite. The intrigue with some grand lady, of which Madame Eudeline was so proud, seemed to have come to an end. At any rate Raymond did n't mention it any longer. He was occupied now by some other affection, more absorbing, it would seem, and one which kept him away from them more than ever. "I don't know," Dina had said; "but I 'm afraid there 's something. Mamma knows nothing either, only she feels certain that her Raymond cannot have taken up with anyone except some woman of distinction."

When he got to the entrance of the house, he found Madame Alcide with her broom making an heroic struggle against the inrush of the driving snow.

"Ah, it is M'sieu Antonin; how pleased M'sieu

Raymond will be ! Did you ever see such wind and such snow ? ”

And so the good woman ran on without losing a single stroke of her broom, which she was plying with such vigour that it was as difficult for Antonin to get his foot inside the door as it was for him to get a word in between her rapid sentences. At length he managed to ask whether his brother was in.

“ I don’t think M’sieu Raymond is there, but Madame has just come back.”

“ Madame ? ”

He was just on the point of going back again to ask her what sort of a woman this was, who was in Raymond’s rooms, and then a feeling of shame and a dread of interminable explanations made him pause. No, after all, he would go up ; he must find out for himself what kind of woman it was, who was called “ Madame ” in his brother’s rooms.

When he came to the fourth floor he went quietly towards the door and listened before he rang ; but there was someone evidently watching within, someone who heard him coming, for the door opened quickly.

“ Antonin ! ”

“ Genevieve ! ”

She had her hat and mantle on, and was looking just the same as ever, very lovely, only paler than ever ; but perhaps that was the effect of the gas on the landing, or the surprise of seeing him there instead of her expected Raymond.

“ I thought I recognised his step, Tonin,” she murmured, smiling, “ but come in, come in, don’t stand there in the cold.”

He had taken her gloved hand and pressed it warmly, and as he went in he said :

“ Oh, I am so glad to see you here, Genevieve ; do you often come ? ”

“ Oh yes ; very often.”

“ Ah, then you will know this—this woman who—you know what I mean—the one they call Madame.”

Then in a gentle tone and with a sad little smile she replied :

“ But I am Madame ! ”

Those who feel very deeply only break their hearts once. Think of all that Tantine was to him ! She was his ideal woman—something of the mother, something of the sister, and something else besides. Ever since he could remember anything there had not been a joy in his life, or a hope for the future, which had not in some way been connected with her, which had not seemed to smile at him out of her eyes and with her lips. For him she had been the Madonna of Fourvières, all Dina’s medals, all Madame Eudeline’s romances in one, and now he had found her here like this !

As soon as he was seated beside her in the parlour, his first word was prompted by the thought that came straightest from his heart :

“ But why has n’t he married you ? ”

In that gentle manner which never seemed to leave her she began to tell him how it was that they could not marry. It was the old story. Raymond could not do it while he had his mother and sister to support—while he already had a household on his hands. He had not the right to burden himself with another. He, indeed, had wished to marry her ; it was she who had refused ; she could not allow him to do it.

“ Poor Genevieve ! ” he murmured, gently stroking the hand which he still held. Outside, the wind roared

and whistled round the balcony, and the hard snow rattled against the window-panes. She, still smiling, pointed to her wet mantle and said :

“ You see, I have n’t taken my things off yet. Raymond will be in presently, and then we shall go out to dinner as we do every Sunday. You ’ll come with us, of course. When I got back from Morangis I heard that you had come and I told him.”

At the mention of Morangis and the thought of all that had passed there, her voice trembled a little and the colour mounted to her cheeks. How good they had all been to her, in letting her old father remain under the impression that the true explanation of her absence was her supposed work with Casta ! If it had n’t been for that, what would have happened ? She did not dare to think of it.

“ But, Genevieve,”—somehow he did not feel that he could call her Tantine now—“ don’t you think that this is very dangerous ? Your father lives too near to you, and I ’m afraid that some day he ’ll find out. It is true that neither mamma nor Dina have any notion of it, and neither had I ; and when I heard that Raymond had a—a—what do you call it ?—a madame——”

“ You thought of every woman in the world except Tantine, my poor Tonin, did n’t you ? ”

He bent his head for a moment and pursed his lips ; then he looked up again quickly and said :

“ But the first thing to do is to warn Sophie in case she was to meet your father. But you are not friends with her now, are you ? ”

“ Oh no,” said Genevieve, almost angrily ; “ she has been very cruel, very unjust towards Raymond. I suppose you know what she is accusing him of ? ”

He nodded and she went on :

“ Yes, but you, Tonin, surely you could not have believed it ! ”

After a little hesitation he confessed that there was a time when he had doubted Raymond. There were these monthly remittances which came so regularly from no one knew where, this mysterious intrigue, a woman established in his rooms, and his mother and sister forbidden to come there—and, above all, after that adventure with Mauglas surely any suspicions were possible.

“ But,” he said, “ I don’t suspect him any longer. When I saw you standing at the door there, I said to myself, ‘ It ’s all right now, Tantine is here, she will save us. ’ ”

As he said this, they heard Raymond outside talking to someone who had come with him in the ante-chamber. Genevieve rose and whispered :

“ You must love your brother as you always have loved him, Tonin. He is good and honourable ; his pride would never allow him to do anything of that sort. The money which he spends on himself and his family is honourably earned, earned by his talents and his work.”

Then Raymond came in and introduced his brother to two young fellows who came in with him, one of them a tall, pale, cadaverous youth, with hollow eyes, long hair, and rounded back, who had written a little psychological treatise which absolutely reeked with poison and filth ; the other was one of those hangers-on that are to be found near anyone who has the smallest pretensions to be known, and who has money to spend. They were both members of the Vorace, a society of youthful decadents among whom Raymond was begin-

ning to figure pretty largely, and whose interested praises he had mistaken for the voice of Fame.

They all went to dine together on the first floor of an old house in the Rue des Poitevins, and when they had emptied two or three bottles of sparkling wine in honour of the new realistic novel, they made their way without delay to the café on the Boulevard Saint-Michel where the Vorace held its meetings in a big room in the basement. As they were going there, Antonin, who was walking last with Genevieve, sheltering himself under her umbrella, heard one of the Voraces say to his companion :

“Symbolard has brought his lady with him. That means we sha’n’t have any stories to-day.”

In spite of his artisan habits and the roughness of thought and feeling which he had acquired in the workshop, Tonin felt himself hurt by this ; and he saw again, as he had two or three times during dinner, that Raymond ought not to have brought her. Several of these young fellows had women with them, actresses from the smaller theatres, chorus girls, and that sort, and Tonin indignantly felt that his adored Tantine should never have been brought into such company.

The whole evening was passed in music and singing and the delivery of alleged verses which had neither rhyme nor rhythm in them ; and then a discussion arose on the new novel, *A French Family*. Realism, naturalism, what did people want to go on harping upon these strings for ? When the romance of the Man and the Woman had become as deadly dull to read as their life was to live, they would have to go and write the romance of the Dog——

“How wicked they are ! A book which has cost him so much ! Don’t you think so ?” whispered Tonin

to Genevieve, who was sitting beside him in a corner of the café.

“ Yes,” she said, “ you are right. They talk as if they had poisoned themselves with bad ink, the ink they use for their own books. They are too young, and they know too much ; they ’re all trying to climb over one another’s shoulders, to stamp and crush one another down, so that they themselves can rise—that ’s all they care about.”

“ Well, then, Tantine,” said Tonin, with a mournful smile, “ if that is so, I am thankful to my poor father for never giving me any education, when education seems to make wild animals of men like that.”

“ Oh no, Tonin, you must n’t say that,” protested Genevieve, “ knowledge never makes men wicked ; it ’s only these boys who have not had enough experience of life. It ’s not what they know ; it ’s the bad use they put it to. It was that way with Raymond, you know. No one has a softer heart than he has ; but yet, look what a cruel book he has written.”

He trembled as she said this. During the hours that they had been together he had avoided speaking of his brother’s novel, for he felt the subject to be as dangerous as it was painful.

“ Yes, a book that has made us all weep,” she went on in her low, clear voice.

He was about to reply when Raymond came towards them with an open newspaper in his hand. He was white to the lips and seemed greatly agitated. Some ferocious criticism of his book, no doubt. He went and leaned over Genevieve and said :

“ Madame Nas is going to sing the *Centaur*. Go up nearer to her and listen, and, please, don’t look so bored.”

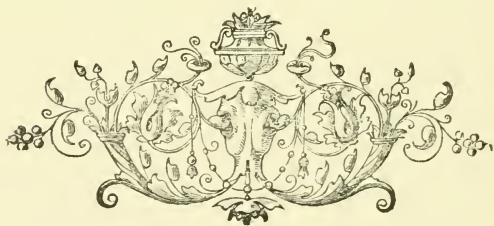
She obeyed him and left the table without a word. Then he put the paper down in front of Tonin and said, pointing to a little paragraph among the Latest Intelligence :

“ I did n’t want to say anything about it before her. The mention of the name of Marques always upsets her ; but just read that, there, that paragraph.”

And Tonin, hardly moving his lips, read :

“ A terrible calamity has befallen the President of the Council and his family. Mdle. Florence Marques, M. Valfon’s step-daughter, died suddenly this afternoon at the Ministry. The unfortunate young lady was in perfect health and was hardly twenty years old.”

“ It amuses me to hear these fellows talking about realism and naturalism,” said Raymond ; “ just fancy how much mystery, how much tragedy there may be behind a little paragraph like that ! ”





CHAPTER XXIII

A HERO

IT was a dark and drenching morning when Antonin came back to Paris after months of hard work among his dynamos on the banks of the Thames. Although he had drawn an unlucky number, his friends had kept on encouraging him in the belief that he would, nevertheless, be exempt from service on account of his stammering and his weak eyes. No such good fortune, however, was his, and so it came about that on this miserable morning he went into the shop with the mournful news that he had been drawn for military service.

This, bad as it was, was not their only trouble, for poor little Dina was needing all her faith in her medals and her Madonna to keep from despairing about her Claudius, of whom she had heard nothing for a month, save the fact that he was no longer in the Engadine.

“Extra ! Extra ! Fall of the Ministry ! Last Moments of the Valfon Cabinet !”

A newsboy in the street screamed out the words as he passed. The fall of the Ministry mattered nothing to her, but how many memories did not the name of Valfon awake within her, memories of marquises and shepherdesses, of silks and satins and powdered hair,

of the beautiful Florence Marques who had died so suddenly that snowy day last winter and had been taken away in a hearse smothered with flowers and drawn by four white horses ! She pressed her hands to her temples as if to drive these visions away, and then, throwing her satchel under her arm, she said :

“ Well, good-bye till to-night, Mamma. Tonin, are you coming to see me to-day ? ”

No, Tonin could not go, he had too much to do—apparatus to order and send to London, some more to get ready in Paris, then he had to lunch with M. Esprit-Cornat, run in to see his brother for a moment, and tell him the bad news of his military service,—he would not have time for anything more that day.

Dina stopped and turned round, with her hand on the door-handle, and said :

“ It ’s a very curious thing, I think, that I ’m never allowed to go and see Raymond myself, just because he receives certain people there. After all the trouble that I took hemming his curtains, and draping his dressing-table, and all the rest of it, now I can’t go and look at them.”

She paused for a moment; then she said to Tonin, with a laugh in her pretty blue eyes :

“ I suppose you must have met some of these fine ladies there, Tonin. What were they like ? Were they very stylish ? ”

“ Dina ! ” exclaimed Madame Eudeline. But the next moment the door was shut, and Miss Dina had vanished.

“ Fall of the Ministry. Latest Particulars about the Valfon Cabinet ! ” the boys were yelling as she passed along the Rue Saint-Germain under a fine rain.

“ I think I know someone who won’t be very sorry

about that," she said to herself. "It's a proper punishment for all the injustice they did him, these Valfons and Marc Javels, just as though there were too many good men in the service of the state."

She had hardly said this before she saw, by the corner of the Palais-Bourbon and on the same pavement as herself, the very man she was thinking of. But it could hardly have been the fall of the Ministry that excited old Pierre Izoard to such an extent that he did n't even see her as he passed, or that made him go along the street gesticulating and talking aloud, so that people stopped and looked back at him. Perhaps it really might have been the end of the session, which would also be the end of his employment, and his departure from the place that he had worked in for nearly twenty years.

Still thinking of this, the little telegraphist turned the corner of the Rue de Grenelle almost in front of the Central Bureau. There was a carriage before the entrance, and the porter, standing respectfully, hat in hand, beside it, pointed her out to an old gentleman who was sitting in it. He was very tall and dried up, his beard and eyebrows were a great deal too black, and his eyes were too brilliant. In fact, he was made up altogether too youthfully. As she approached he got out of the carriage and came towards her, looked at her critically for a moment like a connoisseur regarding some dainty little piece of china, and then, with a sound something like smacking his lips, he bowed very politely to her and said :

"I am his papa, Mam'selle, Tony Jacquand, the Senator of Lyons. Claudius is in Paris and wishes to see you. I confess that during the last five minutes I have learned to understand his feelings. I am

going to take you to the Rue Cambon. Come, jump in ! ”

It was just changing time at the bureau, and there were men and women clerks hurrying about in all directions, and everybody, women and girls especially, stopped and looked curiously at this little Eudeline girl whom Senators came to see in their carriages ; in fact, the visit was a subject of discussion all over the offices until late that night.

Seated alone in the carriage with this young-old man with the wicked eyes, with long legs which seemed to take up all the room, another girl would have been afraid, but the little idolatress had her fetishes with her and felt quite safe in their protection, so, giving voice to the thought that was uppermost in her mind, she said to him :

“ If you please, sir, do tell me how he is ; is he better ? ”

It was so straightly said and the intonation so clear and pure that it went straight to the old man’s heart, and he said :

“ Better, much better, my dear ; I think he ’s saved.”

The next moment he went on in a sterner tone :

“ But mind you, I give you fair warning that it will take eighteen months or two years to complete the cure. That is to say, you will have to wait at least two years before you can be married. You must understand that clearly, little girl.”

Two years ! She would willingly have waited ten, if they would only take her to see him like this, every now and then.

When they got to the house in the Rue Cambon, she saw him sitting in a long chair in one of the windows,

wrapped in rugs, with his head lying back on a cushion. He seemed thinner to her, his eyes and forehead were bigger, and his countenance had that worn, resigned expression which protracted suffering gives to young faces. As she came into the room, he clapped his hands together and cried :

“ Father, Father, is n’t she lovely ! ”

The next moment she was on her knees beside his chair with his hands in hers. Tony Jacquand looked at them for a moment and then, going up to a newspaper rack, he said in his slow, soft, southern accent :

“ The papers are rather interesting this morning, and I ’m going to have an hour with them, so that you can have as long as that to talk nonsense to each other. After that, I shall take Mam’selle back to her office, and go and see Madame Eudeline ; only remember,” he went on, shaking his finger at them, “ you ’ve got to wait two years ; don’t forget that.”

“ Very well, Father, two years, that ’s a bargain.”

Then, without paying any more apparent attention to them, the old gentleman began to read the news aloud to himself so that he could understand it better, while the other two began whispering all sorts of pleasant nothings to each other, which, nevertheless, meant a great deal to both of them. Meanwhile, outside, the twittering of the sparrows and the singing of the thrushes in the garden mingled with the harsh, raucous yells of the newsboys :

“ Fall of the Ministry ! The Last Day of the Valfon Cabinet ! ”

Wherever he went about Paris that morning, whether it was at lunch with his patron, or in the workshops,

or calling upon his customers, Tonin heard nothing but this ; everyone was talking about it. When he arrived at Raymond's rooms he found him, too, dividing his time between dressing to go out and declaiming on the situation to a couple of his friends who were waiting for him in the sitting-room.

" Here are your gloves, Raymond," said Genevieve, interrupting him, and then she went on in a lower tone : " Don't you know what has happened to poor Tonin ? "

Tonin himself, during the two or three minutes that had passed since he came in, had noticed that a change had come over both of them since he had last seen them. Genevieve, whom he had left radiant with health, was looking pale and thin and unhappy. Raymond, always the same in appearance, tall, strong, handsome, with his golden curls and fresh colour, was, nevertheless, changed also, but in him the change was mental. He was more abrupt in his manner, more cynical in his speech, more restless in his actions. He went to his brother and put his arm on his shoulder, with a sort of gesture of protection, and said :

" Ah, well, and so you are a marine now, are you, old fellow ? Well, well, five years, you know ; they 'll go like any others."

" I shall be all right as long as I know that you are with mamma and Dina, Raymond," replied Tonin. He was going to say something else, but before he could stammer out anything more, Raymond had reached the door, followed by his two satellites, and Genevieve's somewhat mournful " Au revoir."

" Oh yes, au revoir ! " he laughed, as he went down-stairs.

As soon as he was alone with Genevieve, Antonin

asked her what was the matter with Raymond, saying that he found him quite changed.

"Oh, there's nothing, I can assure you," she said ;
"Raymond is always the same."

But he, still unsatisfied, persisted :

"Is n't his book going well ? I have n't heard people talking very much about it."

Tantine would not agree to this. On the contrary, it had been a great deal talked about. It was quite as good as could be expected from the work of a new writer. The mistake had been in thinking that a large amount of money could be earned by a book bearing an unknown name. Poor Raymond, always thinking of his responsibilities, had been bitterly disappointed in this respect, but fortunately that was all over now, and he did n't think any more about it.

"Has he given up literature, then ?" said Tonin, opening his eyes wide. "I see there are a lot of scientific books here." He pointed to the table in the sitting-room which was nearly filled with books of medicine, and Genevieve admitted a little uneasily that he had given it up, for the time being, but only for the present, of course. There is so much competition in letters. Anybody can enter it, everybody is envious of everybody else, and they all try and injure their rivals if they can. For her own part, she was very glad to see he had taken to medicine.

Tonin thought that this would be an excellent idea, and she went on to tell him with what courage he had attacked the work, and how he had tried to overcome his repugnance to the ugliness of it, to wounds and disease and that sort of thing.

"And he is so handsome !" he sighed.

And Genevieve replied :

"Oh yes, I have seen how hard he has tried, but anatomy disgusted him too much ; he simply could not do it."

Tonin looked at her stupefied.

"Then—then he *can't* do it?" he said, dropping his hands on his knees.

"Well, for some days past he has been thinking of going in for politics. He has plenty of assurance, a good presence, and a fine voice." As she said this, she rose to open the windows of the sitting-room so as to let out some of the smell of tobacco which the morning callers had left behind them. "They're talking about electing a Municipal Councillor at Charonne, and they want him to stand; only you know that takes up a great deal of time and a great deal of money."

Antonin blushed and stammered :

"Ah, you have n't got money enough to do it. Have n't you—I mean the advances—money that he has had in advance from the publishers? I suppose that's all gone."

"Oh no, not yet."

Then there came between them the uncomfortable silence which always followed any mention of money matters.

All of a sudden the bell rang violently, and in came Sophie Castagnozoff, with her spectacles awry, her hair drenched and sticking to her cheeks and forehead. She threw her dripping hat down on the table and flung her arms round Genevieve :

"So Raymond is out, is he, and I find you here ! Very well, then, I shall ask pardon from you, and from Tonin, too, as he happens to be here."

Tantine drew herself up coldly and tried to pull her arms away, but Sophie would n't let her go.

“Come, come, now ; you are not going to be cold with your old Casta, are you ! Now listen, I have been wrong all along. Raymond is a noble fellow, and quite incapable of what I accused him. I know the true traitor now, the one who gave up Lupniak ; he has been to me to ask pardon, just as I have come here to do ; but never mind that now, we can talk about that later on. There ’s something more important to be done just now.”

She gasped and panted, half suffocated by the emotion and the stairs. And then a few moments later she managed to get out the terrible news, that in an hour’s time, perhaps sooner, Pierre Izoard would be there.

Genevieve caught hold of the table to save herself from falling and murmured :

“My father—then it is all over !”

Tonin tried to reassure her. After all, was Sophie quite certain ?

“Quite certain,” echoed Sophie ; “why, it was Dina who told me he was coming. M’sieu Izoard was with her mother, and although she was very much upset herself—you ’ll know why to-night—she nevertheless saw the necessity of warning her friends in time. It seems that M’sieu Izoard received an anonymous letter, and then several others, telling him that you were not working with me, as he believed you were ; and that, if he wanted to know what you really did with your time, he would only have to come to No. 1 Rue Saint-Germain, fourth floor, to find out.”

Genevieve murmured in a despairing tone :

“Oh, then there ’s no help for it, there ’s nothing more to do !”

“No, absolutely nothing more to do,” added Sophie

in a very different tone. "Your father will come here and he will find you working with me. Here is our table, here are our books, and even two chairs ready at the table. If he asks any questions downstairs, Madame Alcide has my instructions. You know she 'll do anything for me since I cured her child. If he comes straight up, very well, then I 'll explain matters."

All this time Antonin had been looking suspiciously about in search of anything of a compromising nature which might be visible.

"You 're quite sure that M'sieu Izoard does n't know that Raymond lives here," he said, looking up at Casta's spectacles.

"Oh dear no," she replied quickly. "He has never been here, and you know it 's a long time since he has had anything to do with Raymond, he was so angry with him about his book and that affair of his with Madame——" She was just going to say "Madame Valfon," when she remembered and stopped. Then she went on again rapidly: "But never mind that, you just leave me to deal with him. I have puzzled judges of instruction a good deal cleverer than Pierre Izoard, and I don't think he 'll frighten me."

But Tantine drew herself back with a gesture of revolt.

"No, thank you," she said, "we have had lies enough, and I 'm tired of them. This life that I am leading has come to be odious to me, and it has already lasted too long. This poor old man has no one but me to love, and yet I have been condemning him to constant suspicion. There were times when one would have thought that he was actually trying to save me the trouble and shame of lying. When I go out or come in he does n't even ask me, 'Where are you

going ?' or 'Where have you been ?' We are just like two strangers now. Ah ! you would n't recognise our little home at Morangis now, where we all used to be so merry and jolly together. No one speaks, because no one has anything to say. We scarcely even dare look at each other. Well, let him come, and for God's sake let us get it finished !"

"But you are mad, he will kill you !" cried Casta, springing to her feet and pushing her short hair back behind her ears. "You know what ideas he has about these things. He is just like a Virginius, proud of his Virginia, and believing that he holds the rights of life and death over her !"

"Well, suppose he does kill me, what then ?"

"What then ! You know the poor old man could n't survive you, and then what would become of your Raymond, and, besides, you know, there are others that love you."

"Oh yes," said Tonin, with a sob, "you must n't, you must n't !" But Genevieve only shook her head and said :

"Yes, but even then, supposing I was able to hide the truth from him now, even for days, still it would n't matter, he would find out some time—he must."

And as she said this, she looked upon her with mournful eyes.

"Oh, you silly girl !" she said in a low voice ; "how many times have I warned you, how many times have I shown you the dangers before you ! Now look here, Tonin, you go down to the Alcides. I have told them, but they may make mistakes. They may be too zealous in explaining, and, here, take this with you."

As she said this she took a card out of her pocket, and gave it to him, and this was what he read on it :

“DOCTOR SOPHIA CASTAGNOZOFF.”

Tonin ran down to nail this on the door, so as to make another proof in favour of Casta.

Genevieve waited until he had gone down, and then she said :

“ Sophie, please, do not mix me up in this comedy of yours. My heart is too full of tears ; I cannot ! ”

Casta gave her a loud-sounding kiss on each of her cheeks, just such kisses as a nurse might give, and then she took her by the shoulders and pushed her towards the door of the bedroom, saying :

“ But no one wants you to mix in it, little girl ; you just get into your room and stop there.”

Tantine had hardly got into her room before old Izoard's voice was heard outside, thanking Madame Alcide for coming up with him. He came into the room with a hesitating step and a clouded face, but whatever doubts he might have had, vanished when he saw Sophie sitting quietly there at the table with her medical books all about her, and her reports and the prospectuses of the great work before her.

“ But I thought you were living at Ivry, my dear Sophie ; what has made you move ? ”

She pointed to a vacant chair beside her and said in the most matter-of-fact tone :

“ Oh, I left Ivry some time ago. That affair of Lupniak's and the visits of the police had made the place hateful to me. But why don't you sit down, Pierre Izoard ? ”

The old man did n't hear her ; he was stroking his beard and smiling, which with him was a sign of lively emotion, for he saw among the books and papers on the table a portrait of his little girl, which he was very

nearly taking up in his two hands and pressing against his lips.

“And may I ask, M’sieu Pierre, to what I am indebted for this very unexpected visit?” she said, turning round, peering at him through her spectacles. “I don’t think you came to see Sophie Castagnozoff. Oh, yes, yes, I know what you think about her, and, unfortunately, Genevieve is away to-day working at the Botanical Garden at Bayon. Of course you came to see her.”

“To see Genevieve?—oh no, my dear Sophie; but listen,” he said, sitting down beside her and taking hold of her hands. “If you wish to do your old friend a kindness, do not let her know that I have been here. She would want to know what I came for, and I would n’t for anything have the dear girl suspect me. Some day I will tell you, but you only, about the horrible suspicion that brought me here, of the infamy that I have been made the victim of, only I implore you never to let Genevieve know that I have been here. But then there’s the housekeeper—suppose she were to tell her.”

“Oh, you need n’t be afraid of that,” replied Sophie, “I will tell her not to; both she and her husband are devoted to me. They had a little child that they thought incurable, and I cured it for them. And would you believe, Pierre Izoard? it was through them that I found out who betrayed Lupniak. It was this Alcide himself; he is an old Communard, you know, and has had ten years’ hard labour. Therefore he has such a terror of the police that he told everything the moment they asked him. But when he found that I had cured his child, he was taken with such a fit of remorse that he shut himself up for days, and would

hardly speak to anyone, until this morning, when he came here sobbing with his wife to confess to me. I pardoned him on condition that he would help me to set Lupniak free, because you must understand that I will risk everything for that. Yes, I don't care what it costs, I will wait six months, twelve months, rather than that this brave fellow shall finish his life in New Caledonia, and so that I can take him to Calcutta with me."

Pierre Izoard rose from his chair beaming. "I can't feel your sympathy for these wild beasts, my dear Sophie," he said, "but for all that, I am very glad to hear what you say, because it proves to me that Raymond could have had nothing to do with this man's arrest. After all, his brother was right; he is better than I thought he was; it is not he who is wicked, it is his generation. But there, I must be going now, and then, my little girl will have nothing to do but to walk in."

This strange hostility, which the good-hearted old man cherished almost to the point of mania against the youth of a generation which he was incapable of understanding, was destined a few days later to be put to a very strange and unexpected proof. He and Esprit-Cornat were sitting in the old restaurant of the Sergeants of Rochelle, with a number of men, all waiting for some expected guest to arrive before sitting down to dinner, when his old comrade said to him at the end of a discussion of the eternal subject :

"Yes, what would you say if I were to tell you that among the youth of this generation, separated from us by a thousand leagues, without beliefs and without ideals, I have discovered a saint, a hero—what would you say to that?"

“A hero among these lads of the present day!” cried Izoard, almost indignantly, “a hero among these manikins! nonsense, my dear fellow, you could n’t do it, I defy you! Just look at all these good fellows that you have got here to-night to say good-bye to Antonin, yet the very one for whom the lad would be looking most anxiously is not here—of course, I mean Raymond. A pretty example of the sort of tailor’s dummy I was talking about!”

“Perhaps young Raymond is very busy to-night,” said Esprit-Cornat, who was also watching the door narrowly.

“Not a bit of it; he is late because there is nothing in a gathering like this to amuse him, it is only a sentimental sort of ceremony, held in the part of Paris that he does n’t know the existence of. No, he’s too fine a young gentleman for us.”

Just then the hotel-keeper came and asked Esprit in a low tone if dinner should be served.

“No, we will wait a little longer,” he replied, and the proprietor disappeared, giving a vision, as he passed through the door, of a large room brilliantly lighted and a long table covered with flowers and glasses.

This long wait was making poor Tonin very miserable, on his last night among his old comrades and fellow-workmen. Raymond lately seemed to have been receding farther away from him than ever. What if he did not come at all, what if he were ashamed to come there among a lot of workmen such as his father had been? And if he did n’t, how would his absence be explained? Then there was that walk home afterwards which he had been looking forward to, so that he might say to him what he had never ventured to say before.

The hotel-keeper came back and once more retired, but this time Esprit-Cornat went with him into the dining-room. Then there came a moment of silence, almost of anguish, during which every eye was turned upon him, as if asking him what it was all about, and he looked shamefacedly around as much as to say, "I'm very sorry, but I don't know any more about it than you do." But suddenly both doors of the dining-room were thrown open, and in the frame of light there appeared Esprit-Cornat with a young soldier of the Infantry of Marine on his arm, a young man whose golden hair and blond moustache and yellow epaulettes seemed to flame under the lamps.

"My friends," said the deep voice of Esprit-Cornat, "permit me to present to you Raymond Eudeline, who has volunteered for the Fifth Marine Infantry, and in whose honour we are met here to-night; for it is in place of his brother that this brave youth has taken service, and it is due to him that we shall be able to keep our old comrade in the workshop."

Then there burst out a tempest of bravos and cheers, and Antonin, white as a ghost, his eyes staring like those of a somnambulist, staggered forward with outstretched arms. His brother went to him and took him by the two hands and said, amidst a new storm of hurrahs :

"Dina was right, after all, Tonin. You are the true Head of the Family, the true eldest son of the widow. I was only that by courtesy. I have come to see it a little late, but I have seen it. You will not have to be a soldier at all, for by giving myself to the flag I have set you free."

Then, turning towards the old man who was coming towards them with the triumphant Esprit-Cornat :

“ Pierre Izoard, will you forgive me for the vexation that my book caused you ? ”

The old man, overcome by emotion, tried hard to find some words that would meet the occasion. He tried Greek and Latin, French and Provençal, and then at last he opened his arms and caught the hero to his breast, his face flushed, and with two great tears rolling down his cheeks he thundered out :

“ *Boun bougré !* ”

All those who are acquainted with our good folks of the South, with their true cries, their true exclamations, will see that Pierre Izoard could not have found in any of his other languages two words which would have so exactly expressed his feelings, just then, as these two.





CHAPTER XXIV

A WEAKLING

“ AT SEA, STRAITS OF BONIFACIO.

“ THIS is my confession, written for you alone, my Antonin. It has cost my pride a great deal to do it, but at the same time, in another way, it soothes it. I do not wish that you should believe that I came away from you a hero when, in reality, I was only a coward. You, at least, whose kind heart has always known how to pardon me, you, to whom I can say anything, shall know the real truth.

“ Coward is perhaps too strong a word. Mauglas was a coward, but, if I have shrunk from doing my duty, at least I have not stooped to baseness. We will say, rather, that I am a weakling, and for being that I have the excuse of the shock of our poor father’s terrible end. It affected us both, but in reality it injured me far more than you. It made you stammer, it may have injured your eyesight ; but it left your will uninjured. In me there was no outward change, and yet look at the difference ! Before our father’s death I carried everything before me at school, and there seemed to be nothing that I could n’t achieve in the future ; and yet after it, I was nothing but a common-

place schoolboy. I worked just as hard as ever, and, perhaps, I was more conceited than ever, but I succeeded in winning nothing at which I aimed. Was it my will or some more hidden force? Probably, but who can tell? However that may be, it is my own belief that, from that fatal day, I lived only externally. Beneath the surface I was like the rocks yonder, which the waves are wearing away into great dark cavities below the white houses of Bonifacio.

“ Yet, you know, Tonin, I took the heritage which our father left us very seriously. It is all very well to accuse me of being a sham. So I was, but why was I, when I began so honestly and so seriously to take up my burden? Why was it that, when I really tried so hard for success, I did not succeed better? We have found fault with the tools, and we have talked about the impossibility of supporting a family on Latin and Greek, but it was not that, Tonin; it was not the tools, it was the workman. It was not that the tools were blunt or useless; it was my hands that were too weak to use them, and yet all these years my pride has prevented me from confessing that even to myself.

“ Ah, the ironies of this life of ours! Remember how at home and in your workshops and at the Ministry of War, where M’sieu Cornat went with me to arrange for immediate enlistment for foreign service, everywhere I was patted on the back and complimented. ‘ You are doing a brave, a gallant thing, young man.’ A brave thing! A gallant thing!—when I was deserting the camp, when I was throwing aside responsibilities, duties, burdens too heavy for such a weakling as I! I was forsaking the family which I could not support; I was leaving wife and child too, for Genevieve

will soon be a mother, and I saw Pierre Izoard's eyes already piercing me to the heart, and heard that great voice of his saying, 'Marry my daughter, or I will kill you!' It was this double fear that made me fly. I felt that I was too feeble to achieve this thing, simple and all as it seemed. I dreaded it almost as much as death—a home to make, children to rear, an example to set before them, a career to choose for them—it was that which terrified me, that which made me a deserter; and you, Tonin, you know how many others there are like me!

"I first resolved to do this after your last return to Paris. After so many avatars, so many barren efforts in literature, in medicine, in politics, I began to wonder whether, after all, I was really good for anything. When I first spoke about it to Tantine, all she said was, 'My poor boy!' Not a word for herself or her child. What did she think of me when she saw me go away? Did she, too, admire me, did she believe in the sublimity of my devotion! I doubt it. She knew better than anyone else how weak I was, and from the very first she loved me just because of it. She is far more of the mother than anything else in her attitude toward me. To her I have never really been anything more than 'her poor boy.' She felt from the first that I was not strong enough to fulfil my task alone, and she tried to help me and sacrificed herself utterly to do so. Tonin, I beseech you, do not abandon her now in her need. I confide her to you. Before long our little Cinderella's marriage with her Prince Charming will make your burden lighter, for Dina will not leave her mother behind the counter of a shop. Then, Tonin, think of poor, good, generous Tantine, and care for her



Longueville

"I AM WRITING THIS ON MY KNAPSACK ON THE FORECASTLE."

and my child. Remember all that she has lost and sacrificed in trying to make me a man.

“ I am writing this on my knapsack on the forecastle of the *Iraouaddy*, and so don't wonder if my sentences are a trifle disorderly. Through the influence of Tony Jacquand, the Senator, and your patron, M'sieu Esprit, I was allowed to pass straight through the depot at Toulon, and join my battalion, which was embarking for Cochin-China, at once. There I shall live the automatic life I love, 'One, two ! Right, left ! right, left !' just as we used to do at Louis le Grand, without even the responsibility of a corporal's stripe, and to temper the monotony of the days—the gorgeous vegetation of the tropics, rivers that smell of musk, the winning of a decoration, and the endless magic of danger.

“ The wind so far has been very high, but this morning it went down. The sea is still very rough, rolling in huge waves through the still air, under a blue-black sky. The ship is rolling and pitching, and sometimes when the fore-part goes up, we can see plainly along the after-deck; and only just now, during one of these brief visions, in the midst of a little group of black-veiled women, something like sisters of charity, I thought I caught sight of the profile of Madame Valfon; and a bit nearer to us there was a big Russian, who reminded me very strongly of Lupniak; and there, just beside him, was the square, shiny face and gold spectacles of our Russian doctress, under a little round hat trimmed with yellow flowers. Poor Sophie, I 'm sure it is she.

“ I remember, some time before I left Paris, reading an article announcing the near departure of Doctor Castagnozoff's Medical Mission to Bombay. It men-

tioned among the nurses who were to accompany her, Madame Valfon, who by the death of her daughter had been led to renounce the pomps and vanities, etc., and devote herself for the rest of her life to works of healing and charity. The article also said that all the efforts of his friends were barely sufficient to dissuade the late President of the Council from going with her, and devoting to the same work talents which might still be of great service to the state. You can imagine how the article amused me, for I recognised at once the pompous and half-mocking phrases of the former editor of the *Galoubet*. For all that, however, I think the old man is finished. Marc Javel's watch keeps very much better time than his. You remember how, at our father's funeral, he would not go into the church ; you know, too, that when Florence Marques was buried, while Valfon himself was walking up and down outside Sainte-Clotilde, I saw Marc Javel with bent head and bended knees on a prie-dieu before the choir, beside that precious Wilkie, who is also pretty well up to date and knows very well that Auguste Comte's Scientific Republic has had its day.

" Yes, Pierre Izoard was right, the worst of them all is Marc Javel, an air-balloon which floats wherever the breath of popular favour blows it, a man who is of no use for anything or to anyone, but who deceives everybody. He will certainly go farther than all the others. There is nothing good in him, no talent, nothing that makes him better than any other man. He has the eloquence of a commercial traveller, and the knowledge of a president of a provincial debating society ; but he eclipses no one, and so he makes an excellent representative man. Finally, Marc Javel does not know

Latin, and perhaps, after all, that is the secret of his strength.

“Tonin, Tantine, I beseech you not to let my boy learn Latin—and not to give him any classical education. My father sacrificed himself to get it for me, and it has done me nothing but harm. . . .”

THE END



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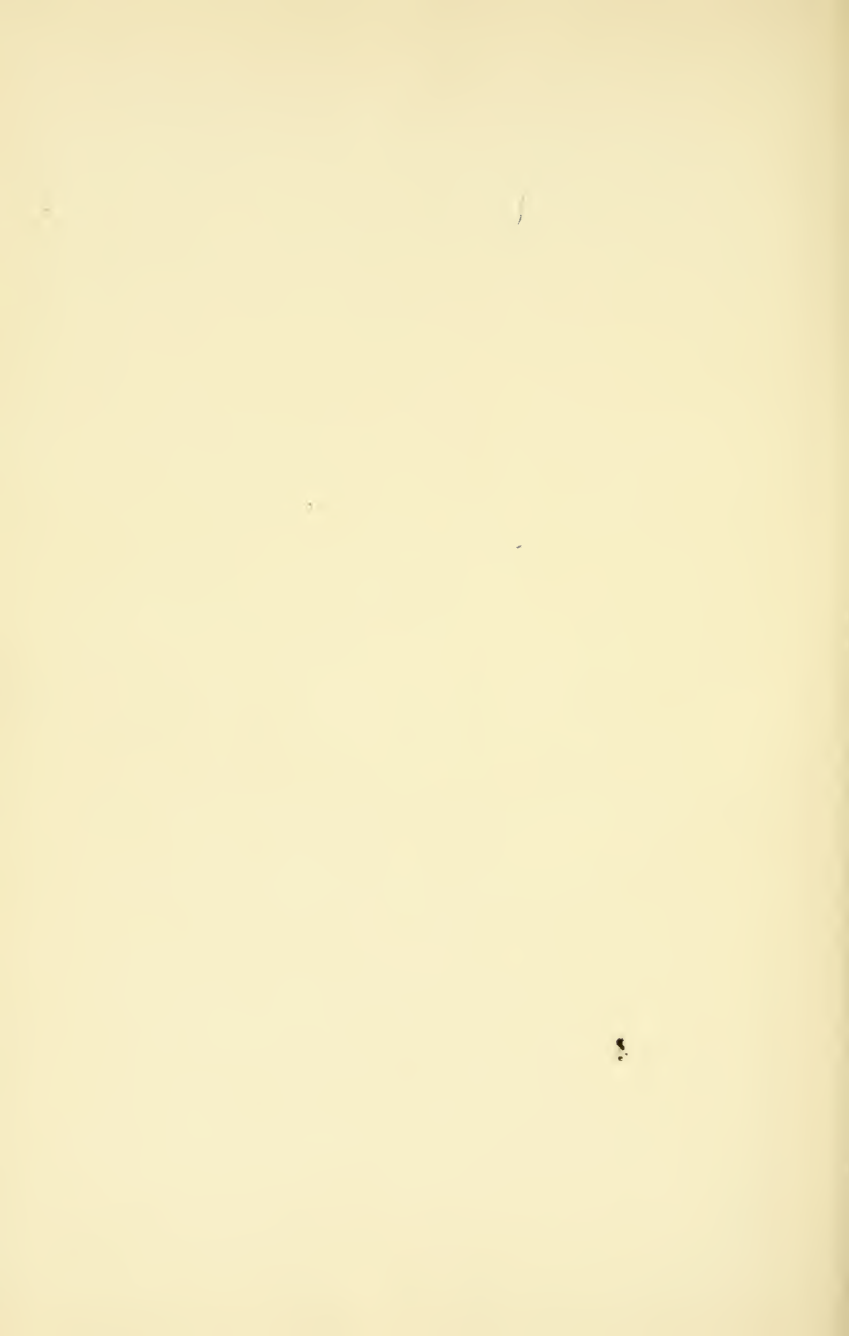
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